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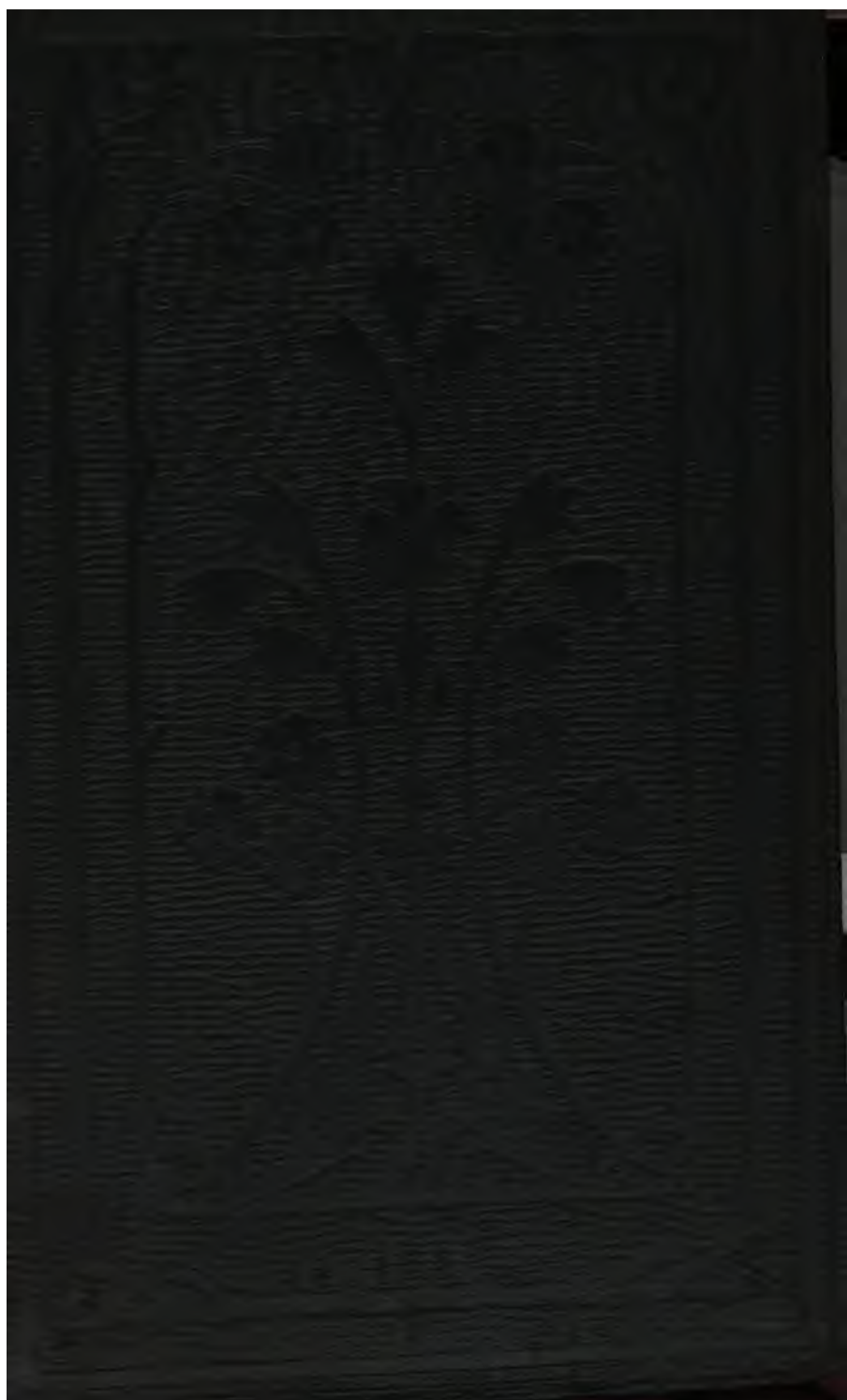
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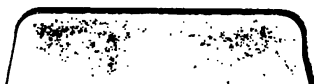
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# D A R K   A N D   F A I R .

BY

SIR CHARLES ROCKINGHAM.

AUTHOR OF

"ROCKINGHAM," "ELECTRA,"

&c. &c.

"I saw her and sighed for her as the thirsty longeth for water.

EASTERN TALE.

IN THREE VOLUMES.

VOL. I.



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# D A R K   A N D   F A I R.

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## CHAPTER I.

I HAD passed the whole winter in the country alone—yes, the whole winter, and the summer before it, too, and the previous winter also, and the anterior summer and so on, retrospectively, during three continuous years. But quite alone?—Ay, quite alone; for of parents, or children, or brothers or sisters, and such-like natural or unnatural appendages, I had none:—my friends were not neighbours—my neighbours were not friends; and there was



something or another about Rockingham Hall, or, perhaps, about its inheritor, which did not invite any lengthened stay on the part of the occasional acquaintance, or visitor. Perchance, I was in some lamentable distress of estate, body or mind? By no means. My balance at Ransom's was fast growing so respectable, as to become positively harassing—my health, upon the whole, was satisfactory, I am much obliged to you; and, as to my—what shall I say—my spirits, they were pronounced, I believe, to be tolerably even and equable, as masters' spirits go, by not the most indulgent, or the least observing of critics—my domestics of every degree. Still, there must have been a reason, and a cogent one, too, for this long and absolute seclusion. Of course, there was, and thereby hangs a tale; and a tale such as ladies will occasionally listen to, and gentlemen also, for that matter—but that tale is not my present one, nor has it any reference to it.

Well, this winter—this third winter of loneliness—had shared the fate of all its forerunners, whether cold or wet, or cheerful or dreary ; it was spent, it was gone, or nearly so, and young March, a bluff and rude herald enough, by the way, was giving many an earlier note of the returning spring. Thus the expanding sky was wearing a brighter hue—not yet the longed-for tint of gold, but the cold, brassy counterfeit which will precede and recal it—when I sat down, one morning, to my early breakfast.

On the table I found three letters, the seals and superscriptions of which I curiously scanned, as is my wont, before proceeding further. I recognized thus that the two foremost and largest of these missives were from my banker and my agent respectively. Both these communications were as anxiously expected by me as any which I had awaited or received for many a long day, and yet they

remained unopened or unheeded whilst my attention and gaze were riveted upon their slender associate. It was not a few years since I had seen that seal and that hand, but they were all unforgotten, and it seemed, even now, that the spell which they had so freely borne with them, in the olden time, had not wholly lost its neglected influence upon me. The little letter was from Lady Edward Die-away, my first cousin, and not my first cousin only. As undoubted, and no less distinct, a priority might that Emily have claimed, in a still more endearing appellation, had she ever felt so inclined ; but the Fates, who delight in cross purposes, had decreed it otherwise. To be sure, we should never have been very equally matched in point of years ; for at that period, when her dark locks and languishing eyes had first entranced me, I had not been long at Eton, while she had seen two London seasons ; still, I can very well remember

having felt conscious of no such disparity when I had danced twice with her at the county ball, or when, in some retired recess, I would read over, for the twentieth time, one of the letters with which she would actually favour me. They were days, indeed, when, on my return from the morning school, I would find one of those letters awaiting me upon my homely table. How my heart would thrill and throb at the glowing accounts they would bring of the last London ball or *déjeûné*, where all would have been too perfect, too enchanting, had I but been present! Yes, there it was, in her own peerless hand. I had been thought of, actually missed, and wished for, in the culminating splendours of the imperial west-end—thought of, missed, and wished for by her! Then the descriptions of her dress, and of the flowers in her hair, and of the rival Lady Hermione Devereux's dress, and the flowers in her hair, which she, my fair

correspondent, had thought rather becoming than otherwise, but which many others had pronounced to be quite outrageous. Yes, once a fortnight, nearly, did they come, those blessed letters, during three whole months, each more affectionate than its forerunner, until I had actually begun to conceive—no matter what—these are not my confessions; when, one morning, as I was devising how a wife and a young family could possibly be accommodated at my tutor's, the last of that series was delivered to me. Gracious heavens!—it could not be, and yet it was—she was going to be—positively, going to be—married, and I, forsooth, was called upon to rejoice, and to try and obtain a holiday for the wedding. I can remember that morning, at all events—I mean the morning when that letter was received—how I rushed to the water's edge, and gazed into its mysterious depths, vowing that, had I not been such a practised

swimmer, and sure to strike out instinctively, when once beyond my footing, I should, then and there, have sought a revengeful end. Eventually, however, calmer feelings prevailed. I found some relief, on my homeward way, in administering a desperate thrashing to a luckless clod, who had thrown a stone, neither at me, nor at any one else, I firmly believe; and further solace was afforded by the vow, that I would neither answer the fatal letter, nor even write again, to the faithless inditer. During three whole years that vow was scrupulously observed; but time will bring with it its changes, and its chances. When I made my timid *début* in the long promised pleasures of London society, none welcomed me so kindly, nor upheld and assisted me, more effectually, than Lord and Lady Edward Dieaway. I was their daily guest then, as likewise later, during the winter which we passed together at Naples—but, from thence,

our paths had sadly diverged, and, since the death of her husband, I had only seen the fair Emily once, upon her return to England, after a prolonged stay abroad. It was to that meeting that she referred in the letter, which I was now proceeding to open, and which was to the following effect:—

“Stanhope Street,

“Wednesday.”

“MY DEAR CHARLES,”

“When you called on me, heaven knows how long ago, you were kind enough to say, that it would give you very great pleasure, if I and Lavinia, now, little Vinny, no longer, were to make you a lengthened visit at Rockingham Hall. I saw no great prospect then of being able to accept your agreeable and pressing invitation; but should you feel inclined to receive us at present, I should be most happy to spend a part of this spring with you. Pray let me hear that this would be quite conve-

nient to you ; and, should it be so, it would afford me the greatest satisfaction to pass some little time with you again. We have been sad strangers of late, and we must, I fear, remain so, unless I thus actually take your retreat by storm. You will find your old ally in wofully altered health and spirits, but the doctors agree in recommending change of air.

“Your very affectionate cousin,

“EMILY DIEAWAY.

“P. S.—For a particular reason, which we shall have full leisure for canvassing when we meet, I should feel very much obliged if you would take no notice whatever of this letter, when you answer me ; but write as if you were really annoyed at our not having gone to you sooner, and were particularly anxious that we should choose the present time for our promised visit.”

This was a startling communication, indeed, for a bachelor, and such a lonely one as I



was, to receive. It was perfectly true that, in the excitement of our last meeting, I had pressed—and very seriously pressed—my cousin to come down to me, as soon as she could, as often as she could, and for as long as she could; and, had she taken me at my word, I should have then been tolerably prepared to redeem my pledge of a joyful welcome. Months, however—and, indeed, years—had elapsed since I had been betrayed into these unguarded expressions; I had become miserably inured to my secluded habits—every member of my household had shown his deference for my tastes, by eagerly adopting them, and, indeed, it was a question now, whether each and all of them had not grown to consider the absolute exclusion of all society as one of the conditions of their engagement. What on earth was I to do now?—where was I to accommodate, in my old-fashioned retreat, these fair visitors, accustomed to every

refinement of luxury, which London or the Continent could afford or invent?—how was I to entertain them?—how was I to amuse them? There was no escape, evidently none; and yet, it would scarcely have been consistent with common prudence to return the only conceivable answer, until I had taken a few preliminary soundings of the unknown and terrific channel, into which my frail bark was so suddenly hurried.

Mr. Redhill, my butler, was first summoned.

“Redhill,” said I.

“Yes, Sir Charles.”

“I believe that — that Lady — Edward Dieaway, and her daughter, will come down and spend a little time with me, here.”

“Here, Sir Charles?”

“Yes, here, of course,”

“Indeed, Sir Charles?”

“You seem very much appalled by the intelligence, Redhill.”

“I, Sir Charles? No, Sir Charles. I hope not, indeed, Sir Charles. But, to say the whole truth, I don’t know, for the life of me, Sir Charles, how it would be possible, in the present state of the establishment, to receive ladies—and London ladies—and west end of London ladies, too.”

“Where is the difficulty?”

“Where is the difficulty, Sir Charles? why, with your leave, it is everywhere. I have trouble enough to get on as it is, God knows; but if it comes to have the house full of company, and grand company, too, I have not the sort of people under me, by any means, that I should have, and I may as well tell you so now than later.”

“You must do your best, Redhill, that’s all,” answered I, observing the natural gloom of my faithful attendant’s countenance growing most alarmingly intense, as the whole anticipated consequences forced themselves upon

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his mind. "You must do the best you can for me, and we shall have plenty of time yet, to talk over the details. Now, I had better finish my breakfast."

Mr. Redhill was retiring, with a mournful step, but, suddenly stopping, he veered round again, and said, with desperate resolution—

"I beg your pardon, Sir Charles, but I really must ask of you to break the matter yourself to Mrs. Roberts and Mrs. Peach."

Mrs. Roberts is my housekeeper, and Mrs. Peach was then my cook.

"Indeed, Redhill," I exclaimed, "I think that you might as well do that yourself: I have other matters but this one on hand, this morning."

"I can't do it, Sir Charles—I really cannot. Mrs. Peach and I have not spoke a word for the last four months; and, as to Mrs. Roberts, her hysterics have been so shocking bad of late, to my knowledge, that

I cannot be the party to bear such news as this to her."

"Well, let me finish my breakfast, there's a good man ; and, in about ten minutes, you can send them up to me—Mrs. Roberts first, and then Mrs. Peach."

Within a quarter of an hour, a faint knock at the door apprized me that my directions had been complied with.

Mrs. Roberts is now a middle-aged, tall, slight, and, perhaps, angular lady. Her spirits, which never were of the most buoyant, have been much affected by the neglect and unkindness, which she conceives that she has experienced from Mr. Roberts, her husband, and which, after sundry quarrels and *rapprochements*, have led to their final separation. She is, besides, a very unlucky woman. She seldom walks out without encountering a mad bull, a mad dog, or an amazingly vicious horse. She never drives without an upset, or

something bordering upon it; and, even in her room, she is exposed to more accidents, or unpleasant occurrences, than all the remainder of the household together. The last of these—a fire, which had broken out at her very side, as she was dozing over the newspaper, had so seriously deranged her nervous system, that constant medical advice had been required of late. I observed, even now, that she trembled very violently, as, with a faltering step, she enquired—

“Do you want me, Sir Charles?”

“Yes, Mrs. Roberts, I wish to inform you myself, that I am expecting some company; and that, I trust, you will take good care of them. It is Lady Edward Dieaway, and her daughter. What rooms do you think they would like best?”

“Indeed, Sir Charles, I can’t say. They are London ladies, I am told, and will find nothing here good enough for them. What I

am to do, heaven only knows, with the housemaids we have—besides, the rose and elder-flower water being quite out, which is no wonder, considering how ill and wretched I was all last summer.”

“ Well, such matters can easily be supplied. Let us first settle what rooms they are to have. Should you recommend the blue-rooms, or the damask suite, or the east suite ? ”

“ Really, Sir Charles, I can't say. The damask-rooms will be objected to, because they look north ; and the east-rooms are over the kitchen ; and there is one of the chimneys in the blue-apartment quite out of order. Besides, no mortal being, but me and the housemaids, has been near them for years without end ; and I am blessed if I know how they are ever to be got ready for such ladies as these.”

“ But these ladies are very like other ladies, I should imagine, Mrs. Roberts.”

“ I beg your pardon, Sir Charles, but they

are not like other ladies. I have seen something, and heard more, of them, and of their fancies, and of their difficulties ; and so we shall soon learn, if we did not know it before."

"Come, come, Mrs. Roberts," exclaimed I, "we are not quite so badly off, after all. The blue-rooms, if properly set in order, will do very well ; and we shall be quite ready in full time, with a little activity and good will."

Perhaps, there may have been a slight tinge of impatience in my voice and manner ; or, perhaps, Mrs. Roberts had by this time worked her nerves up to that pitch where the most trivial incident would have precipitated the catastrophe. At all events, the fit was now upon her.

"Activity !" gasped she, convulsively—  
"good will ! I only (sob) hope that nobody in this house (sob,) will show less than I shall (sob, sob), that's all. To think that it should



have come to this, (sob) in this house, (sob, sob) after so many years of service, (sob) and all the accidents I have undergone under this roof, (sob.) God help me, I say, God help me! (sob, sob.)”

Several minutes ensued before I could restore anything like composure, and I availed myself of the first slight intermission, to bring the conversation to a hasty issue.

But my severest trial, as I had instinctively foreboded from the first, was yet to come. The constitutional gloom of Mr. Redhill, and the nervous infirmity of Mrs. Roberts, were sufficiently unwelcome, to be sure, in such a crisis as the present. Still, long experience had taught me that, among their faults and failings, any absence of real deference to my wishes, or any latent spirit of insubordination, were not to be reckoned; and I felt a secret consciousness that, with them, my injunctions would ultimately prevail. With respect to

Mrs. Peach, however, I could entertain no such confidence. Though she was comparatively a new comer, and though my intercourse with her had been limited to the unfrequent, but also very courteous exchange of a few passing observations, something about her had always intuitively warned me, when she was near, that I was in the presence of a master-spirit, whose intensity of purpose was unquestionably superior to my own. It was not, therefore, without a slight emotion that I beheld the entrance of this portly personage.

“ Good morning to you, Mrs. Peach,” said I, in the most propitiatory tone that I could command, “ I hope that you are quite well.”

“ Quite well, thank you, Sir Charles. I hope that you are the same. I am given to understand that you are expecting company.”

I have already insinuated that Mrs. Peach is a powerful woman—she is—a very large woman, and a very powerful woman—and all

her appearance betokens vigour and resolution, not unmixed with that rapidity of temper which her profession is held to promote. On this occasion, and as she thus abruptly plunged into the very depths of the question, she looked truly formidable.

“I am, indeed, Mrs. Peach, expecting a visit, but from two ladies only.”

“Oh yes, to be sure, from two ladies honly, but fine London ladies, with their fine London ladies of lady’s maids, which is worse than themselves—and a fine London gentleman who is walet, if you please, and a footman who will give more trouble than any two Squires in the county. Now, Sir Charles, perhaps you will be pleased to remember that when I hofferred you my ’umble services, my honly question, after the wages, was whether your place was a quiet place or a busy place.”

“I recollect well, Mrs. Peach ; and when I assured you that it was a very quiet place, I

think I said no more than circumstances have fully confirmed since."

"Well, there may be two tales to that story, perhaps, but never mind that now. I have had trouble enough, and to spare, since I came here, though it's not been from the company, I am free to admit. But as a new leaf is to be turned over now, Sir Charles, I may as well tell you at once my view of the case. I left as good a place as hany in England, because my 'ealth couldn't stand the wear and tear of it; yet I didn't leave it to go to a worse, Sir Charles."

"But, my dear Mrs. Peach, I really do trust, from your appearance, that your health is no longer such as to give either yourself or your friends any cause for uneasiness."

"I beg your pardon, Sir Charles, but appearances is not always to be trusted. From a gurl I have suffered by blood to the 'ead, and the doctors have warned me, again and

again, that if I overtax myself, I shall bring on something bad—the 'termination to the brain, they calls it. Now, if we are to have this company, and the company that we are to have to meet them, no doubt, and all the so forths with it, I shall bring on the 'termination, as sure as we are both standing here. I have no hystericals, thank God; no blue devils, as others have who are not a 'undred miles away; but I have no wish, for all that, to shorten my nat'ral term, Sir Charles."

"God forbid, my good Mrs. Peach, that you should be exposed to any such risks on my account. As, however, I shall now, more than ever, require an efficient cook, I am afraid that I must conclude, from what you say, that you wish to give me warning."

"No, Sir Charles, I do not wish to give you warning. When I wish to give you warning, Sir Charles, I shall give you warning, Sir Charles. I have done so, before now, helse-

where, and I shall know how to do so again, when I am put to it. If it is you, Sir Charles, who are giving me warning, all I can say is, I 'ope that you may find as good a servant, particularly at the roasts."

"You have quite misunderstood me, Mrs. Peach; I am very far indeed from wishing to part with you, or from undervaluing your abilities. It was rather you, I had imagined, who were inclined to leave me."

"By no means, Sir Charles," replied Mrs. Peach, evidently somewhat pacified by the mixture of firmness and courtesy with which I had endeavoured to meet her. "I certainly meant you to understand, Sir Charles, that it is a new state of things, for which my 'ealth may not be hequal, that's all. Hotherwise, I am willing to try and do my best; but the less all this is to last, the better for everybody."

"Thank you, Mrs. Peach; I am sure that

neither I nor my guests will require more from you than your best."

I had hoped the interview might have closed here, but Mrs. Peach had evidently something yet to add, and she did not withhold it long.

"Sir Charles," resumed she, after a very short pause, "perhaps you know, or perhaps you don't, that I am what's called a English cook, and nothink else."

I nodded a silent assent.

"I never was hout of England, nor never wish to. I never dressed a French dish, nor tried to dress it. So that, if your company expects to find snails in my soups, or frogs in my side-dishes, they had better not come my way. That's the long and short of it."

"I am convinced that they will be perfectly satisfied with your performance."

"I 'ope so, Sir Charles—I 'umbly 'ope so; but I can't do better than my best; and, if I

am to be badgered and bantered about my cooking, nothink more likely to bring on my 'termination of blood to the 'ead. The more that's known, the better; and now, Sir Charles, I 'umbly wish you a very good morning."

Having proceeded so far, I thought it expedient to make a summary inspection of the blue-rooms, before I wrote to accept my cousin's proffered visit. I found that the work of preparation was already progressing—and cheerily, too; for, as I entered, as gladsome a voice as I had ever heard, unwittingly greeted me from the inner room. The words of the gay carol, as far as I could distinguish them, were somewhat as follows:—

"I wish I had a crown of gold,  
And a golden sceptre too,  
And the fair'st gems that ere were sold,  
For to give them all to you (*bis.*)

"You seem in good spirits, this morning, Susan," observed I.



Susan is my head-house-maid—neither very young, nor very comely; but, certainly, the readiest, and the most cheerful daughter of Eve with which a bachelor's household was ever blessed. We seldom met without exchanging a few words, and these never failed to put me in better humour with myself and all around me.

“Well, Sir Charles,” replied Susan, continuing her dusting with redoubled alacrity, “I am not dying of the pip yet, thank God. These are no times for hysterics, and blue devils, and the like, when the whole house has to be got ready for company—and London company, too.”

“You don't seem to dread these two poor visitors as much as others do?”

“Dread them, Sir Charles? Lord bless their hearts! they have already given me the best day I have had for a twelvemonth. I like a little stir and bustle—it is life to me.

And, as for their being from London, they are all the more welcome to me for that. I know London folk as well as other people do—perhaps, better—and they are just the civilest, and the most thoughtfulest, and the least troublesomest of any. That's what they are! Besides, their dresses, and their dressing-boxes—it is as good as a play to see them, any day."

In this guise did the busy Susan warble on, still accompanying her ready tongue with her still readier duster; but I had grown an inattentive listener. I am somewhat given to moralize, in my solitude, upon the passing events of my narrow sphere, and to build synthetic structures, of vast magnitude, upon the casual observations of my homely life. It had now struck me of a sudden, though not for the first time, how marvellously our transient race is endowed with the varied gifts of its manifold callings; and how, in our utmost

need, the required aptitude is often, while we least suspect it, the nearest at hand. Here had I been, during the whole morning, contending for due support in my emergency, on the part of the most favoured among my retainers; and now, it was freely—nay, blithely—afforded from a quarter where I had not dreamed of seeking it. I did not fail to perceive to what good purpose Miss Susan's alacrity might be turned; and, having further stimulated it by the promise of a new gown, I retired, with much revived spirits, to answer Lady Edward Dieaway in the prescribed form. Little did I imagine then, how far different would the consequences of that visit be from these earlier forebodings of my lonely housekeeping.

## CHAPTER II.

THE ten days which elapsed between the reception of Lady Edward Dieaway's letter and her actual arrival were full of care; comprising, amongst other cheering little incidents, five distinct hysterical attacks of Mrs. Roberts, two warnings from Mrs. Peach, and an endless variety of skirmishing among the minor domestics. Still, the house and the reserved apartments especially, wore as bright and as attractive an appearance as circumstances could well admit of, when the expected day overtook us.

That day was as unpropitious, atmospherically speaking, as any which the ficklest of seasons has ever produced ; and it was amid a lingering equinoctial gale, agreeably diversified by sleet, hail, snow, and rain, in almost uninterrupted showers, that the heavy coach and four hove, or rather drove, within sight. I was at the hall-door, as in duty bound, to receive my fair visitors, whom their sixteen miles drive from the station had sorely overcome. Scarcely should I have recognised my cousin when my eyes first fell upon the white and blue tints of her frozen features ; as to Miss Lavinia, she prudently kept her veil down until circulation had been partially restored.

“My dear Emily”—exclaimed I, after the first greetings, “what a day you have had for your journey, to be sure ! I feel quite conscience-stricken at having urged you to come so far.”

“You are, indeed, an unheard-of distance

from the railroad. Could not it have been brought nearer ? ”

“ Not without more interest than I possess ; but pray come into the library and have some tea. It is hardly five o'clock yet.”

“ Perhaps you will allow me to go up to my room at once : I am so overpowered with cold and fatigue. Clarges,” continued Lady Edward, addressing her maid, “ see that nothing is forgotten in the carriage, particularly the sal-volatile and camphor-drops.— And, Lavinia, my dear, do exert yourself a little ; you are so helpless travelling ! If you would at least, but secure the chancelière and the Scotch wrapper——”

“ Dear Mama,” answered a voice from under the double veil, “ do trust to Clarges, and nothing will be lost. Had we not better go up out of the cold ? ”

I lost no time in escorting both to the doors of their apartment, where I left them, with an

entreaty that they would rule and direct everything in my forlorn house according to their sole convenience. As I returned to the library, my usual sitting room, I grew conscious of an unbidden feeling of gratulation within, which, when analyzed, appeared to arise from the recollection that I could in no ways be held responsible for my cousin's journey or visit. I had not, however, remained very long absorbed in the perusal of the last debate, when I heard a slight rustling at my side, and, on looking up, beheld a very graceful apparition indeed.

"I beg your pardon, Sir Charles," said the fair comer in the purest London accent.

"Mama desires me to tell you, she hopes you will go up to her in about half-an-hour, as she is too tired to come down again before dinner."

"I shall be most happy to see her, but I beg that she will put herself to no sort of inconvenience for me."

"Thank you, very much, but, I really

think she wishes to have some conversation with you."

"Pray sit down, won't you, and have a cup of tea," continued I.

"I am much obliged to you, but I have had some upstairs."

"Well, but do sit down a moment by the fire, and warm yourself. You must have been nearly frozen on the road."

"Very nearly, indeed."

"I fear that you had a most unpleasant journey."

"Most unpleasant."

"Are you at all fond of the country?"

"No, not at all."

"Perhaps you like the continent?"

"Not particularly."

"I dare say, then, you think that there is no place like London?"

"None, that I know of."

"Especially at this time of the year?"

"Especially at this time of the year."



"You will, I fear, find Rockingham Hall very dull."

Miss Dieaway languidly raised her eyes from the fire, which they had, as yet, been intent upon contemplating; glanced, for an instant, upon the shadowy expanse of sleet and mist without, and said, in a tone of the deepest conviction—

"It looks so, indeed."

"You would scarcely like to pass three whole years here, alone, as I have done."

"I would die first."

My conversational powers, which had been but slightly exerted of late, were now fairly spent for a time. A few minutes' silence ensued, during which—Miss Lavinia's eyes still remaining riveted upon the fire—I had a fair opportunity of more closely examining her, without encountering them. From a child, little Vinny had been a beauty, and given every token of remaining one. It was I myself who, in former days, at Florence, when she would sit on my knee by the hour, resting

her silken ringlets on my shoulder, had christened her 'the Fairy'—an appellation to which she might still have laid some claim, now that her matured comeliness had realized the brightest promise of its dawn. In her face, form, and, dress, all was exterior grace, symmetry, and charm; and even in her averted eye there lurked a secret witchcraft, which its present half-mutinous, half-sorrowful expression could not wholly divest of its influence. How time, with its changes and its chances, was accomplishing its work! Could it be that little Vinny, whom I had never thought of but as a child, even since I had known that she was one no longer, was already invested with the majesty of womanly loveliness?

As I gazed on, she still remained all abstracted and motionless—her intense look never withdrawn from the burning embers, and her whole attitude as she reclined, with folded hands, in the deep arm-chair before me, bespeaking nothing but languor and sadness.

My youth was already gone, and, now that it was past and spent, I was beginning to regard it as its own all-efficient specific against every ill. How could it be that the very Hebe who was sitting there before me, was already shrouded in such a veil of care? Surely no family loss or misfortune could have befallen her of late, or should not I have heard of it? Whence, then, this gloom upon the brow of her sorrowful youth? But youth has its sorrows too, and they are mostly of one complexion. I felt curious, very curious, to know more—and scarcely less so, as a secret misgiving was arising within me, that I might have involved myself, more than was expedient, by my hasty and unreflecting compliance with Lady Edward's request.

My fair visitor was still sitting opposite to me, in apparent deference to my request, but she showed no more endeavour to resume the conversation than she had manifested before to continue it. Upon my offering her the newspaper, however, which she declined, she raised

herself a little, as if with a slight effort to shake off her pensive mood. Observing this, I said—

“ I fear that you are tired with your journey ?”

“ Do I look so ?” rejoined she.

“ Yes, in a way—like a rose after a shower of rain.”

Miss Dieaway here, for the first time, smiled slightly, whether in approbation or in derision of my attempted compliment, I know not, as she replied—

“ The stem is not quite broken, only bent a little.”

“ A ray of sunshine will soon revive the flower.”

She glanced listlessly at the window, as if to discard any metaphorical sense, and merely said—

“ We shall have long to wait, I fear, for that spell.”

“ I do not know when to promise it, indeed,” rejoined I; “ but its season is at hand. You were sorry to leave London just now ?”

"Very sorry."

"Were you at any balls this year?"

"One or two; they are only beginning now."

"Are you fond of balls?"

"Very fond."

"And of the opera?"

"Passionately."

"I suppose that your departure has cast into mourning a host of admirers?"

"I don't know; I never wished for many."

"One would scarcely be enough?"

"One would be quite enough, were he faithful and true."

There was something in Miss Dieaway's tone, as she uttered this last remark, which would have been warning enough for me, even had none proceeded from within, that I could venture no further in that direction. 'Faithful and true,' thought I. Is this a tribute or a reproach to the absent one? No matter now; the subject must be changed.

"Do you remember me at Naples?" resumed I.

"Oh, yes, very well."

"And at Florence, too?"

"At Florence, too? Yes; but not quite so distinctly. Still, I think it was there that you first called me 'the Fairy.'"

"It was. We were great friends in those days."

"Were we?"

"Yes; very great friends. Not greater, however, I trust, than we shall be now that we have, at length, met again."

She merely replied by inclining her head with a smile—again a very slight one, indeed—but, after a moment's pause, she said, as she arose from her chair—

"Are you at leisure now?"

"Yes, quite at leisure. Why?"

"Because mamma will be expecting you, I suppose."

"Indeed—so soon? Can it be that it is already half an hour since you came to me?"

"Rather more," replied she, glancing towards the clock.

When I joined Lady Edward, I could see that she had done her best to efface the traces of her wearisome journey ; but, unfortunately, years, and their accompanying cares and sorrows, had left a more indelible impression behind. As my eyes rested upon those altered features, scarcely could I believe that there had been a day when I had known no other heaven ; but the past, upon which we chiefly conversed, seemed insensibly to restore much of its vanished charm, and the more we recalled it, the more would it combine with us in obliterating its own havoc. There was, besides, in my cousin, with all her defects and infirmities, a feminine grace which age could not destroy, and ere we had been long together, it seemed to me, and, apparently, to both, as if we had never parted.

Whilst her daughter remained with us, we conversed on almost every imaginable topic, saving that one alone which we were both most anxious to introduce ; but when Lavinia was informed by her maid that the dressing-bell

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had rung, her mother advised her immediately to comply with the summons, and said to me, the moment we were alone together—

“You must have been much surprised to receive my letter.”

“Surprised? I can remember nothing but the pleasure it gave me.”

“Oh! You are always saying pretty things——”

“Or attempting to.”

“Attempting and succeeding. But, with all your civility, you must have been rather astonished to find a mother with an only daughter whom she presented last year, seeking a pretext for flying away from London at the very beginning of the season. Come, you may as well be frank at once.”

“Well, perhaps I might be a little surprised, if I thought the daughter a willing agent in the matter.”

“Ah!” enquired Lady Edward, “has Vinny said anything to you?”

“No, not a word that could give me any clue.”



"But, I dare say she has sufficiently shown that this *déplacement* of ours does not meet with her approbation."

"Perhaps, indeed, I may have gathered just so much."

"Exactly; but now I must tell you all, of course, in the strictest confidence. Never, perhaps, was a poor, forlorn, widowed mother in so sad a predicament as I am. I am not at all ambitious for Vinny; I neither seek nor desire any extraordinary or out-of-the-way connection for her; but, still, I do not wish her quite to throw herself away, with her good looks and pretty good fortune. You think her attractive, don't you?"

"Unquestionably."

"I believe she really was admired last year, and would have been so still more, had she helped herself a little. But, as my usual ill-fortune would have it, the only person whom she seemed to notice was a silly, foolish younger brother of a cousin, with neither wits, prospects, nor character."

"May we ask his name, after this encomium?"

"His name is ours, unfortunately, Walter Dieaway?"

"Let me see, your nephew and her first cousin?"

"Precisely. He is the second son of my brother-in-law, Languidford. And this, perhaps, is the worst part of it; for, not only did it blind me, at first, to the true nature of their intercourse, but it makes it much more difficult for me to restrict it."

"And have you not opened her eyes to those qualifications of the suitor which you touched upon just now?"

"I have done my best, but to no effect. Indeed, all I have said has only made matters worse, and, *pour renfort de potage*, she has struck up the very closest alliance with a mutual cousin, who is aiding and abetting both, in this silly business, to the utmost of her power."

"Who may she be?"

“Camilla Dareall—old Lord Dreadnought’s daughter.”

“How is she their cousin?”

“My gracious, Charles! you will soon forget your own name in your solitude. Do not you remember that my poor Edward’s and Languidford’s sister was Lord Dreadnought’s first wife?”

“To be sure, I recollect now; but I never saw her. She died very young, I believe.”

“Well, this hopeful damsel, who is a Dareall to the backbone, has got into her obstinate and impertinent head, that, for reasons of my own, I am standing between Vinny and her surest chance of happiness; and she has almost persuaded her that she is a wretched victim to some unaccountable fancy of mine. Not the least unfortunate part of the business is that, for this intimacy, if not for both, I have no one but myself to blame. When I returned to England, after so many years’ absence, with neither health nor strength to go much about, I thought that I could not do

better than to recommend Vinny to associate a good deal with her nearest relations. Her uncle Languidford appeared to like her amazingly. Lady Dreadnought, the second, who is everywhere every night, undertook to take her out; and now it is almost impossible to separate her from them without a regular quarrel."

"But, if the connection is so undesirable, could not these worthy people be persuaded rather to further your views than to counteract them."

"No, I have not the slightest assistance to expect in that quarter. Languidford, though he will not exactly admit it with me, is most anxious that this hopeful son of his should marry, and, if possible, reform; nor can he think Vinny, with her thirty thousand pounds, a very bad Mentor for his purpose. As to Lady Dreadnought, she seems to have but one object in life, that is, also, to marry off her turbulent step-daughter. Now she has persuaded herself that the Lothario in question is

in fact attached, as far as he can conceive any attachment at all, to the said Cammy and not to Vinny. When I speak to her of my apprehensions, she smiles at my maternal delusions—assures me that I have nothing to fear—that if Cammy were to give the slightest encouragement to Walter Dieaway, he would marry her to-morrow, and that the best way to bring that about is to stimulate her by a little wholesome jealousy. ‘Trust to me, my dear Lady Edward,’ says she to me, in her mincing way, ‘I see more of them than you do, and I have my eye always on them. Cammy, who, to give the devil her due, can take a man by storm, as well as any girl in England, will wake up in earnest so soon as she is satisfied that Walter Dieaway is really attentive to another. The day she chooses to have him, she will have him, and she will choose it whensoever she sees another girl in the field. After all, he has twenty thousand pounds; though he may not do for you, he will do very well for me, and you may rely upon it that I will secure him if I can.’”

"Are you sure that Lady Dreadnought's view of the case is not the right one?" observed I.

"With all deference, I think the maternal delusion is on her side, and not on mine. As to Cammy Dareall, whose manners are odious, and quite unbearable to my taste, I have no reason to believe that her heart is not honest and true, nor that the friendship she so loudly professes for Vinny, is not perfectly sincere. At all events, of this much I am certain, that that foolish child Vinny's head has been quite turned between them all, and, also, that there are plenty of traitors in the camp. Had I remained in London, where the Languidfords are just returned, and the Dreadnoughts immediately expected, all the sinister influences would soon have been at work again. I, therefore, determined to try what could be done by stealing a march upon them, as well as by the old specifics of change of air, and scene and company. You can now understand my letter to you, and how much I feel in-

debted for your kind compliance with my wishes."

Lady Edward here paused for a moment. I felt that I must be looking rather grave, but I responded to her acknowledgment in the best terms that I could devise.

"We are tolerably safe here," resumed my cousin. "I believe that you know very little of the Languidfords, or of the Dreadnoughts?"

"Scarcely anything; and, besides, no one ever comes near me."

"That is just what I want, for I am satisfied that a little calm reflection will do wonders for Vinny when she is once again left to herself and to me. I am sure you can remember what a good, obedient, tractable child she used to be, always as sedate as a judge, and the last, one would have imagined, to do, or even to contemplate doing, a foolish thing. I dare say that I have been accused by some of having been rather severe with her; but those who knew more, could tell that no severity was ever required, at least,

not until the last year, during which she has become quite an altered creature. Now, my dear Charles," continued Lady Edward, rising, and taking both my hands, "you can see the whole of my perplexity, and why I have applied to you as to my best and surest friend and ally. You must tell me, *sans cérémonie*, how many weeks we may discreetly stay with you?"

"My dear Emily, say rather how many years you can spare me."

"Ah!" resumed she, "you are also to play into my hands as much as you can, with the view of opening poor Vinny's eyes to the supreme folly of foolish matches. I have already prepared her to find in you a man of the greatest sense and experience of the world; and, if you will but take up the cue whenever I give it to you, I shall be able incidentally to throw in many a telling observation. I must not forget," concluded she, "that I am dressed while you are not, and that I should not detain you any longer."



I left my cousin's room in a more serious mood than I had entered it. Her object appeared to me righteous ; her conduct, upon the whole, judicious ; her appeal to my friendly co-operation, natural and legitimate. Still, I could not wholly overcome an increased misgiving, that, without some caution and care, I might be implicated more than was advisable in a matter where I had no rightful concern.

## CHAPTER III.

DURING dinner, so long as we were not alone, our conversation was—as that of sensible people is, or ought to be, at such times—rather guarded and reserved. I could observe, however, that Lady Edward, when the important preliminaries of her cushions, toast and water, hot negus, &c., &c., had been duly disposed of, eagerly watched the first exit of the servants, to introduce those topics which might be brought to bear upon the subject that doubtless engrossed the secret thoughts of the three principal personages present.

"Our poor Naples friends," she then remarked, "have been sadly dispersed by time and its influences. You know that Lady Markam is dead?"

"Yes, and poor Lady Abbotshall too."

"She, at least," resumed my cousin, "was spared the misery of witnessing her daughter's separation and all that preceded it."

"That was a sad business, to be sure! What a pretty girl she was when we were at Florence together!"

"Yes; and she has no one to thank but herself for all the wretchedness that she has undergone. Nothing would serve her, in spite of parents and friends, and common sense itself, but to marry an odious roué, who left her for a common actress two years afterwards."

"She was betrayed," rejoined I, "into the one irretrievable error of life—a bad match."

"She is as much to be pitied as any of those who willingly court their own misery, by flying in the face of all their natural

advisers. I feel scarcely less for her than for her sister, whom Vinny and I saw last year, over a grocer's shop in the Strand, cutting out cotton dresses for her six starving children—a girl who had refused an earl and two baronets. I own I was amused to see her come to open her door herself, and looking more dead than alive when she beheld us.”

I must here observe that, with the honest anxiety of an inexperienced host, I had not failed to remark, from the first, that Miss Dieaway was doing very poor honour to what good cheer the combined ingenuity of Mrs. Peach and her master had devised for this critical day. After allowing the first course to pass away almost untouched, she had just, to my great satisfaction, begun a more earnest attack upon the wing of a spring chicken, when the conversation took the turn to which I have alluded. Few people like to be talked at, particularly a young girl in a strange house. This I might as well have remembered, ere I had thus far complied with Lady

Edward's wishes ; but for the effect produced upon my youthful guest, by our covert inroad upon her secret thoughts and feelings, I could not well have been prepared. Miss Dieaway first coloured very deeply, then grew very pale, and finally relinquished her incipient endeavour to take some share in the appointed pursuit of the hour. Fairly conscience-stricken now, I hastily observed—

“We are destroying what little appetite Miss Lavinia has brought with her, by conjuring up these fearful images. We should also remind her that they are happily but exceptions to the general rule.”

Lady Edward, however, was not to be so easily arrested in her course.

“If they are but exceptions,” rejoined she, “it is because obstinacy, disobedience, and improvidence are fortunately not the rule.”

“Precisely,” resumed I ; “and that is why Miss Vinny should certainly proceed with her wretched apology of a dinner.”

Poor Miss Vinny ! she was now in the un-

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fortunate position of one who feels that she should say something and knows not exactly what. Again she coloured deeply, and, in a faltering voice, muttered—

“I assure you that you are not spoiling my dinner at all. I know very well that all people are not happy—the richest and the greatest not more than others.”

“Certainly,” observed her mother, sarcastically; “but where extravagance, dissipation, and silliness go together, the chance of any domestic comfort is reduced to a rather small compass.”

Miss Dieaway attempted no retort to this home-thrust; but, that it was keenly felt, I could not doubt; for all colour once more vanished from her cheek, and she sank for a moment into utter abstraction. Her mother observed this, as well as I did, but, apparently, with a far different impression, for, the servants being still away, she began a fresh attack.

“I think, Vinny, that you had better eat something or other, were it in mere civility.”

"Indeed, dear mamma, I have taken very good care of myself."

"You know the contrary very well. But this nonsensical starvation is on a par with all the rest."

In sheer despair I rang for the servants; and, when they left us again, I talked to such good purpose, as to screen Miss Lavinia from any new aggression.

The evening, however, soon gave tokens of being scarcely more propitious than the dinner. Whether from the effects of her journey, or otherwise, Lady Edward continued to evince considerable nervous irritability, whilst her daughter remained passively, but hopelessly, disinclined to contribute to our conversational entertainment. Intent upon her crochet, as if the fate of Turkey itself depended upon the exact and speedy completion of her half-dozen square inches of work, she confined herself strictly to the utterance of a few inevitable monosyllables, until, upon the appearance of tea, she was constrained to more active exer-

tions. But, even here, her functions were speedily and well-nigh silently discharged ; and, in a very few minutes, the crochet was resumed.

“ You will wear yourself to death with that work at last ! ” exclaimed Lady Edward, querulously. “ Had you not better sing us something ? ”

“ Dear mamma, I really have no voice to-night, after so cold and long a journey. ”

“ Well, then, play us a waltz—a polka,—anything. ”

Vinny adjourned to the piano, though clearly with no very good grace, and began to play with some execution, but with equal negligence. Unfortunately, I am one of those to whom good music, carelessly or inaccurately performed, is a species not only of moral but of physical torture ; and this, though I did not utter a word, my cousin could not fail to perceive.

“ Is it not provoking, ” said she, “ to hear a girl, who has a real taste for music, play in that detestable way ? ”



quired Lady Edward, as I was lighting their candles.

"I keep the most extraordinary hours when I am alone," said I; "but now, of course, your time shall be mine."

"To tell you the truth," replied my cousin, "I cannot hold out to you much expectation of ever seeing me before two o'clock; but Vinny shall make your tea for you at your usual hour. Come, tell me what it is?"

"Nine, ten, eleven. I really do not care."

"Nonsense! Clarges has already told me that it is half-past eight to a moment, and that you are the most punctual personage alive. Vinny, mind that you are down at half-past eight exactly every morning, while we are here."

"Very well, mamma."

"But poor Miss Vinny," observed I, "has, I daresay, no conception that there is such an hour."

"Then, the sooner she learns it the better," said my cousin, laughing. "It will do her

all the good in the world to stir herself of a morning, instead of moping in her room. They say early rising is the best thing imaginable for the spirits and the temper. But now, good night, and try and not dream of Vinny's music."

"It will be no easy matter not to dream of you both, my dear Emily," replied I, shaking hands with her. "I wish you a very good night—and the same to you, Miss Vinny."

I would also here have extended my hand, but there was something so cold and concentrated in Miss Dieaway's look and attitude, that I could not venture even upon this formal approach.

They left me, but I was not alone. It seemed as if my desolate fire-side were still peopled with the varied images of the past—the future—the ideal which their presence had so profusely evoked. How strange that this drama of real life should be acted here, even here! How suddenly had the curtain risen—how intensely had the first homely

scenes riveted the attention of the lonely spectator! What would the sequel be, what the issue, what the part so unexpectedly thrust upon me—for was not I already almost an actor? The more I had gazed upon my younger visitor, the more deeply I had felt that it would be sorrowful indeed, were she to become the victim of her own generous inexperience; but, if this calamity was to be averted, was it by the means I had seen employed as yet? Was it by this secret but continuous under-current of provocation and irony that the wayward spirit, emerging already into its womanly independence, could be redeemed and reclaimed? Look on for ever, in passive silence, upon what I had that evening beheld I felt I could not; and yet with whom to side in this ill-disguised warfare? With the mother who forgets that her authority is now waning fast, and can no longer henceforth be held by the tenure of the past—with the daughter who will fly from the mimic evils of her too straightened home,

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to the real misery of an imprudent emancipation? There was ample ground for reflection here for one who, during three long years, had lacked a single motive for excitement, and my anxious thoughts followed me to my pillow.

Mrs. Clarges was right. I am generally very exact, but on no occasion had I shown myself more so than on the ensuing morning. If the fate of my whole property had depended upon my punctuality, scarcely could I have accomplished with greater diligence the duties of my toilet, though unconscious all the while of any distinct motive for so much alacrity. The appointed half hour had not struck when I entered the breakfast-room, a cheerful little apartment enough, to the south, and not to be confounded with my long, dull, dingy dining-room to the north-west. Gracious heaven! what a revolution, even within its narrow precincts! At my solitary table, a second place duly prepared; on my lonely chimney-piece, an embroidered handkerchief

and a fairy pair of gloves ; in the deep arm-chair, by the blazing wood fire, Hebe herself—the Hebe of my school-boy love-dreams—already seated, and awaiting me ! A treacherous sunbeam, too radiant, thus early, to last, was illumining the gladsome picture where all was bright, all was joyful, saving the cloud which yet sat upon my Hebe's brow, as if her thoughts were still of her forsaken Olympus.

I took her coldly-proffered hand, and eagerly inquired after her health.

“ I am only pretty well, thank you.”

“ Not quite recovered yet from the fatigues of the journey ?”

“ The journey has very little to do with it. Shall I make your tea ?”

“ Whenever you please. I do trust that these immoderately early hours will not be unpleasant to you. We can alter them as much as you like.”

“ Not on my account, for the world.”

We sat down to breakfast, but the conversation could only be kept up by unceasing

efforts on my part, and, what was worse, Miss Dieaway ate still less than she talked.

"Yours is a mouse's breakfast!" exclaimed I, at last. "Will you not have another piece of toast?"

"No, I thank you. I have quite finished."

"I am afraid that this very early rising cannot agree with you. Seven hours' sleep is, perhaps, not quite enough at your age."

"Seven hours!" said she; "I do not suppose that I had five last night."

"How comes that?"

"I did not go to bed till past one, and then I was so afraid of being late, that I was awake long before six."

"Indeed! I am in despair at this. What would it have signified if you had been late?"

"Mamma told me that she would never forgive me if I were to keep you waiting. By-the-bye, I suppose you will not mind telling her that I was down before you?"

"Certainly; I should be too unhappy if you were ever to be scolded on my account."

Miss Dieaway here fixed her dark eyes upon me with some earnestness, and said, in a less distant tone than heretofore :

“ Indeed ! ”

“ Why should you doubt that I am speaking in all sincerity ? ”

“ Why ? ” repeated she, with a faint smile. “ Because I have not been here a day yet, and you have already managed to get me twice scolded.”

“ I, Miss Vinny ! What can you mean ? ”

“ Oh ! it does not matter : it is over now.”

“ But it does matter very much—very much indeed. Can you think that I should wish to be the cause of any annoyance to you ? ”

“ Well, perhaps not, after all ; I do not see what good it could do you. But you must be careful, then, not to abuse me to mamma.”

“ I abuse you, my dear Miss Vinny ! ”

“ Yes ; you need not look so thunderstruck. It is sure to come round to me before long.

I was saying that I did not go to bed last night before one o'clock : do you know why ? ”

“ No, indeed.”

“ Because mamma scolded me till past twelve, and then I cried till one— besides having been scolded before dinner, on your account also.”

“ But what, in the name of Heaven, can I have said, or can I be accused of having said, respecting you ? ”

“ Ah ! you must know best. Did you or did you not tell mamma before dinner yesterday that I looked so wretched and miserable— she calls it, sulky,—as to make you quite uncomfortable ? That was the text of my first scolding.”

“ Well, all I can say is, that I am as unconscious as the new-born babe of having supplied it. Perhaps, I may have said that you would, I feared, find Rockingham Hall a little dull after London ; but, if I did, it was with the best intentions in the world, I can assure you.”

“ That is one way out of it, at all events ;



but as to your abusing my playing, I heard it myself, and that was text the second."

"I can recollect one unguarded expression there ; but you may rely upon my being most careful in future."

"Perhaps you had better, for mamma is very dangerous in those matters, and makes a tool of everything now against poor me."

"You may be sure that she has but one object at heart, nevertheless, and that is your happiness and welfare."

"I do not doubt it, and am thankful to her for it. Still, I do not think that she should treat me so like a child, now that I am a child no longer."

"Perhaps not ; but parents are very apt, I believe, not to take sufficient account of the lapse of years on this head. That will not last, however, if she finds you as anxious as of old to comply with her wishes."

"I trust I show myself so."

"Upon all points ?"

"Yes, upon all points," replied Miss Die-

away ; but, suddenly, her eye anxiously sought mine, and she coloured very deeply indeed.

After a moment's silence, I felt irresistibly impelled to proceed a step further, and I resumed—

“As you have allowed me to say so much, my dear Miss Vinny, perhaps you will suffer me, as one who takes the deepest interest in your welfare, to add another observation. The strictest obedience upon all minor points could not now outweigh your resistance upon the most important of all.”

This time the fair Lavinia seemed not only confused but irritated at my presumption. She blushed more deeply still than before, and said, at length, with no small asperity—

“And pray how do you know in what I obey, and in what I resist?”

“I know more than you think, perhaps.”

“I dare say you do, and I am glad to hear the confession from yourself, as it throws no small light upon your share in this blessed visit. I had suspected as much from the first.”

"If I know anything, Miss Vinny," said I, rather startled in my turn, "it is since yesterday afternoon only."

"Oh ! I dare say."

"As truly as we are sitting here."

"Well, whether it were yesterday or before, the greater the shame for those who told you anything about it ; that's all I say. It is no business of yours, any how."

"No, in truth ; and if I have unjustifiably alluded to the subject, my best atonement will be never again to introduce it."

"You will show your sense thus, at all events " said Miss Dieaway, rising to retire.

"What, so soon !" I exclaimed. "I fear that I have scarcely mended matters with you."

"Scarcely, indeed ; but I must now go to mamma."

"When shall I see you again ?"

"At luncheon-time, I suppose."

"The morning looks unpromising, but still, perhaps we might steal half-an-hour for a walk. I should like to show you my gardens, though, indeed, they are desolate enough now."

“Thank you, I can find my way to them by myself.”

Again was I left alone, with abundant matter for reflection, but whether my thoughts afforded me much cause for self-gratulation, I leave it for the sympathizing reader to conjecture.

## CHAPTER IV.

AT luncheon time we did meet again, but my younger visitor was now accompanied by her mother. In answer to my anxious inquiries, Lady Edward assured me that she had slept comfortably, and felt very well, for her, and I was happy to observe that she was in a serener and more equable frame of mind than on the previous evening. So sedulous was I to supply and to pursue indifferent topics, that not the slightest inroad was made upon her daughter's pensiveness, until we returned to the library. It then became necessary to

determine our plans for the afternoon, and this, unfortunately, led to a little more skirmishing.

“What do you think of the weather, Charles?” asked my cousin.

“I do not know what to say. The glass is going down, and the clouds are thickening. I fear that it will be stormy and uncertain, at best.”

“Then I think that I shall not venture out; the air is so much keener here than in London. But you, Charles, are out in all weathers, and have always plenty to do. Pray do not think of us, as we can take good care of ourselves. Vinny, my dear, you had better get your umbrella and go out at once, before the weather is worse.”

“Indeed, dear mamma, I would rather stay at home. I have a little cold already.”

“Nonsense, nonsense, I cannot allow any moping here. Go and get ready immediately, and walk to the gardens, which I am told are very pretty. It will give you something to talk about, at all events.”

My services had been so peremptorily declined in the morning by Miss Dieaway, that I felt no inclination to renew the offer; but I proposed the barouche or pony carriage.

“Not for the world,” replied her mother; “she wants exercise as much as fresh air, and we must take care that she has plenty of both. Now, get yourself ready at once, I say, Vinny, and stay out for a good hour at least.”

Ere the door had well closed upon the departing Vinny, her mother observed :

“That is a singular girl, to be sure! It is not very often that she is impertinent or openly disobedient, but there is a sort of passive reluctance to do every thing that I enjoin, which is most irritating. It makes me quite ill at times.”

“Perhaps,” ventured I, most insinuatingly, “would it be wise occasionally to take her own inclinations into greater account, now that she is no longer a child?”

“If I were to do that,” rejoined my cousin,

hastily, "we should soon see some very strange results."

"I am speaking of minor points, of course."

"Upon all points, whether trifling or important, so long as she perseveres in her present frame of mind."

I could well perceive that my projected mediation would scarcely find more favour in the eyes of the mother than of the daughter, so I attempted to carry it no further for the present.

My farm and its duties completely engrossed me during the afternoon, and I saw no more of either of my visitors, until I found Lady Edward in the drawing room, immediately before dinner.

"Where is Miss Vinny?" inquired I.

"Heaven only knows," replied her mother.

"She has got into an odious manner, of late, of never knowing, or pretending not to know, what the hour is. I suppose that she is only beginning to dress now. Is that the dinner bell?"



"I believe so; but there is no sort of hurry."

"Yes, yes. Let us go in immediately: it will serve her quite right."

I accompanied, or rather followed, Lady Edward with a very slow step, and, in the hall, we met the culprit.

"You are late, Vinny," said her mother, rather triumphantly.

"Not quite, dear mamma," replied Vinny, smiling.

"Quite enough, let me tell you, to be very uncivil to Sir Charles."

"Come, come, Emily," said I, "no one but he has a right to scold her on that account."

Lady Edward's nerves, however, were again in a lamentably excitable state, for no sooner were we seated, than she discovered a fresh grievance.

"Vinny," exclaimed she, "why on earth have you that extraordinary silk handkerchief tied round your neck?"

"Because I have the beginning of a sore throat, dear mamma."

"I thought as much, just because I asked you to take a walk."

"Indeed, dear mamma, I never dreamed of accusing you or any one else," said Lavinia, impatiently. "If you wish, I can take the handkerchief off."

"Pray do not, Miss Vinny," interposed I, "it is extremely becoming."

Seeing that I was so determined a peacemaker, Lady Edward allowed a truce to be enforced during the remainder of the dinner; but I well saw that enough had been said again to dash the small stock of spirits which her daughter had brought down with her, and my feelings of hospitality were once more severely tried.

Among the improvements or innovations for which Rockingham Hall is indebted to the railway, I should not forget to mention the introduction of the second post. I am old-fashioned enough myself not to attach any very great value to the boon, my private correspondence being particularly restricted and un-

"She has ; and she is kind enough to say that she would stay on for any length of time at Dreadnought, if we were to go to her. But that, of course, is out of the question."

"Why, dear mamma?"

"Because I could not dream of putting them to such inconvenience, not to speak of our engagement here."

"But how long are we to stay here?"

"I do not know ; that depends upon circumstances. Some little time, at all events."

"But could not we go there for a week?"

"No !"

"Why not?"

"Because I don't choose to. Besides, you were so dreadfully knocked up with this journey, I could not venture to force another upon you."

"It is not the journey that makes me ill : it is being here away from all my friends."

"I am very much obliged to you, indeed, for the compliment."

"But Cammy thinks it so very hard that we should be separated thus."

"I do not intend to be guided at all by her opinions, and you may tell her so, if you please."

"Well, at least do you think that he would let her come here for a few days?"

"He! Who?"

"Sir Charles."

"No. Indeed, I should not wish it myself"

"Why not?"

"Because I should be sorry that he should form his opinion of your acquaintances from seeing her."

"Well, all I can say is, that this is cruel, very cruel indeed. I knew very little of my cousins when I first came out, and it was you yourself who desired me to be as intimate as possible, both with the Darealls and the others. I do my best to comply with your wishes, and no sooner is our friendship established than every obstacle is devised to prevent our meeting."

"And whom have you to thank but yourself, pray, for all this? So long as you choose to be guided by the opinion of others, and not by

mine, I shall certainly take every reasonable precaution to prevent your becoming the tool or the victim of their designs."

"But all that has nothing to do with my friendship for Cammy.

"Oh, no! nothing at all. Can you really think me quite such a fool as not to know by this time the real motive for all this frantic affection? I am better aware than you may imagine of the advice that you will get, and of the examples that you will find, in that quarter. Indeed, it is a question whether I should not put a stop to the correspondence also."

"Perhaps you had better send me to a convent at once."

"I shall endeavour to find some other means of effectually preserving you from your own inexperience and folly."

I was at no loss to conjecture, from what I overheard of this conversation, that, without some strenuous exertion on my part, the remainder of the evening would not be very

pleasantly worked out. No sooner, therefore, was our tea disposed of, than I took possession of the last newspaper, and continued to read aloud every interesting or uninteresting passage that met my eye. I so far succeeded in the object I had in view, that, within half an hour, Lady Edward was fast asleep, upon observing which, her daughter cautiously arose, lighted her candle, and glided noiselessly from the room. Fearing that this evasion, which was final for the evening, as I suspected, should be prematurely discovered, I continued to read without cessation, prolonging thereby my cousin's slumbers until eleven o'clock had struck. She then aroused herself, expressed a fear that, notwithstanding the deep interest with which she had listened to me, she had been betrayed into a few moments of unconsciousness; and having ascertained what the hour was, and that Lavinia had already withdrawn, she retired, also, to her rest.

On the following morning, so punctual was

again my fair companion, that we actually met at the breakfast-room door as the hour was striking. I had secretly hoped that I might succeed, whilst we were again alone together, in making some progress towards her confidence; but I was doomed to be sorely disappointed on this head. Miss Dieaway was more than usually absent and depressed, and there was a pallor on her youthful cheek, and a languor in her suppliant eyes, which bore strong testimony to the increasing indisposition of which she complained. There was a curse, besides, on the weather. Once more, the sleet was falling in ceaseless showers, and the dreariness from without seemed to invade and to pervade even our genial fire-side. One small cup of tea, one slight morsel of toast, and again my abstemious guest's breakfast was concluded. She seemed closely to watch until mine also was finished, when she arose and silently retired.

What was to be said? What was to be done? What was to be attempted? How long was this to last? How long were we,

in this treacherous intimacy, to meet as strangers, nay, almost as foes? From the first, I had never felt quite reconciled to the part which had been so unexpectedly thrust upon me in this homely drama; but now that I could read more and more of the tale of woe so legibly inscribed upon the brow of youth, I became fairly conscience-stricken. Yet how was I to vindicate myself from the implied suspicion?—how to repel the unuttered charge?

At luncheon time, we met again. The morning's heavy rain had cleared the weather, the sun was shining brightly, and Lady Edward proposed some pursuit in the open air.

"It will be rather wet for walking," observed I; "and, besides, Miss Vinny has already seen the gardens, and can vouch for their being sufficiently desolate just now."

"I can indeed," was the heartfelt reply.

Observing that her mother glanced at her, by no means approvingly, I immediately resumed—



“The roads will be scarcely more attractive to-day. What, if you were to come to my farm? The green fields, at least, will not look the worse for the rain.”

“I shall be delighted. I have always had a *passion malheureuse* for a home-farm; and, I understand, that yours has been your *marotte*.”

“And is so still, I fear. When would you like to start?”

Miss Dieaway, observing that I looked towards her, as well as towards her mother, while I thus spoke, abruptly said—

“I trust that you will kindly excuse my joining you, as I feel too wretchedly unwell to go out.”

“Come, Vinny,” cried Lady Edward, “I cannot hear of all this. No wonder that you are unwell, with the life you are leading. A little fresh air will do you all the good in the world; and the sight of something new will excite and amuse you.”

“Amuse me!” repeated Vinny, rather con-

temptuously. "What do I care about green fields or red fields!—you know that I hate the country."

"The more shame for you. I consider no girl to be worthy of an honest man's attentions, who does not like the country. And, besides, what do you know about it? Come, run upstairs, and get ready immediately."

Thinking that a little fresh air might really prove beneficial, I attempted no remonstrance on behalf of Miss Vinny; and thus was she unwillingly associated with us in our expedition.

The aspect of external nature was certainly unprepossessing enough on that afternoon. The glare of the cold, yellow sunshine only brought into more unpleasing relief the miry surface of my cherished roads, and the scarcely clearer puddles that studded every declivity of the adjacent fields. Not a leaf was breaking, not a bud was starting; and, if a ghastlier hue were cast upon the wintry scene than its more kindred December had ever supplied, small

indeed, was the boon afforded to the spectator. Thus, at all events, my younger visitor seemed to think, as, reclining opposite to me in the barouche, well shrouded in her fur pelisse, she mournfully glanced at the general desolation.

Lady Edward alone seemed to gather fresh spirits from the depression around her. She admired everything profusely, pronounced even the cutting north-westerly blast to be seasonable and invigorating, and repeatedly envied the lot of those who were so fortunate as to live with a similar prospect constantly before their eyes. When we reached the farm, her gratification was still more loudly expressed. The dairy cows were out for an airing ; the sheep and lambs were far off, on the highest ground that we could boast of ; and there was nothing to attract the eye but my whole staff of carters and cart-horses, busily removing to the tillage fields the accumulated treasures of my manure yard. Still, my cousin's enchantment was quite irrepressible, and could not but have been highly flattering

to me, had I not apprehended that it might have some contingent and sinister object.

"How delightful it all is!" exclaimed she, again; "it reminds me of my younger days, to see a dairy and a farmyard once more. When I was Vinny's age, I was quite an authority upon chickens and pigs. You have pigs, haven't you?"

"Yes, plenty, in the next yard."

"Oh, I must see them. Come along, Vinny. That is a Berkshire sow, is it not?"

"Yes," said I. "You are evidently a connoisseur. What do you think of her, Miss Vinny?"

"Pray, don't ask me," was the reply. "They all appear to me the most horrible and odious creatures alive. I see a fire in there; let me go and warm myself for a moment, for I am quite perished."

I could well perceive, during the afternoon, that Lady Edward was watching an opportunity for a few words of private explanation with her daughter, but this I was determined not to

afford, and I succeeded in averting it until we were in the hall again, on our return home. A pressing message was then delivered to me, in my magisterial capacity, which required an immediate answer. While I was dispatching it, in the library, I could overhear from the neighbourhood of the fireplace more of the mother's reproaches, and of the daughter's hasty vindication, than was perhaps destined to reach me.

"Well, you have been sulky and disagreeable to your heart's content."

"Why did you make me go when I felt so wretchedly unwell?"

"Because I wish you to see something, to learn something, besides dancing the polka."

"But when all I see appears to me hideous, and disagreeable, why am I to pretend to admire it and to be pleased with it?"

"I believe that common courtesy is supposed to require that we should show some acknowledgment for any effort made to amuse us."

"I said nothing uncivil that I know of; but

DARK AND FAIR.

as to appearing in high spirits, feeling as ill as I do to-day, that is quite out of the question."

"Who requires you to be in high spirits? All I ask is common civility and good humour, for my sake, if not for you own."

"I am doing my best, dear mamma."

'Well, you must try and do better. See how I am exerting myself, and I should like to know which of us two is really unwell. I am fairly knocked up, at all events, and must go and rest for an hour or so before dinner."

"I suppose that I may go too?"

"No; not quite yet. He really must have observed your manner and behaviour this afternoon, and you must try and make some little amends. Surely, you can be sociable and pleasant for a quarter of an hour, can you not?"

By the time that I had sealed and sent my letter, Lady Edward was gone, and Lavinia, having taken off her bonnet, was sitting in her own adopted attitude, still gazing at the fire. As I watched her, however, I remarked,

what I had not beheld as yet, the heavy tears gliding fast along the slender hand upon which her cheek was resting. Had each in succession been the richest jewel ever hung upon an Ethiop's ear, could they so forcibly have arrested my attention? More strangely than before my heart smote me, and yielding to an irresistible attraction, I was soon by my weeping captive's side.

"I fear, Miss Vinny," said I, "that you are really very far from well."

She seemed annoyed at my observing the whole extent of her weakness, and answered, rather abruptly—

"Yes—no—it does not much matter."

"It does matter, very much indeed. Can I do nothing for your happiness or comfort?"

"You?" said she, in a softer tone. "No; what could you do?"

What could I do, indeed? Were her thoughts my thoughts, or her ways my ways?

"Do not, at least, let me add to your annoyance. I fear that you are staying here, merely out of compliment to me."

"Did you hear what mamma was saying to me, just now?" enquired she, rather startled.

"Yes, partly."

"And what I said to her also?"

"A portion of it."

"Then, I fear," said Miss Dieaway, colouring deeply, "that you must think me very rude and ill-bred. I am not quite so bad as I may appear, Heaven knows; but, perhaps, it is as well that you should learn the truth, after all."

"That truth being, that you were very sorry to come here."

"I was."

"That you are very unhappy here?"

"I am."

"And that you are very anxious to go away as soon as you can?"

"Precisely: all this not on account of you, you know," added she, laying her hand gently upon mine; "but for—in short, for other reasons."

"But, dear Miss Dieaway," resumed I,



"does it not strike you that I, as master of this house—perhaps I should rather say, of this prison of yours—may have it in my power to do something to meet your views?"

"I fear not," replied she; "Mamma is so very determined, and you cannot quite turn us out of doors. Besides, you see, I am not very sure that you are not in league with her against me."

"How can you suppose that?"

"I have my reasons; but, never mind, you must know best. Do you want me any more now?"

"I! No, of course not; though too happy and too proud that you should stay with me."

"Well, then," resumed she, with a slight smile, "tell mamma, by and by, that I have been very agreeable—very pleasant—and so forth—and let me leave you now. When I came home I was shivering with cold, and now it seems as if this blazing fire were too much for me."

I observed that she was much flushed, and that she did not rise up without a painful effort ; but, ere she had moved many steps towards the door, her hectic colour suddenly vanished ; and, with a deep moan, she rested her hand upon a neighbouring table.

I rushed forward to support her, and thus averted the fall.

For a few seconds, her slender form lay, motionless and senseless, in my arms. I suffered it to glide gently to the floor, slightly upraising her head ; and, as she thus reclined, consciousness slowly returned.

“Where am I? What has happened? Gracious heaven! why am I here?” were her first bewildered exclamations.

“It is nothing ; you have fainted. Let me call some one to your assistance?”

“No ; not for the world!” cried she, eagerly ; “it is over now. Pray do not mention it to mamma, nor let her hear of it.”

She attempted to arise, but her strength was not sufficiently restored. She buried her

face in her hands, and burst into an agony of tears.

Here was a strange position for the solitary recluse, to whom the enchantment of womanly presence, womanly joy, and womanly sorrow had been, during three whole years, unknown and almost unremembered ! Scarcely heeding that, as I knelt at her side, my arm was still upholding her, the victim wept on as if her youthful heart were breaking, merely answering my entreaties to be calmer with the most impassioned expressions of despair. As I gazed upon the prostrate figure, the convulsive agitation with which it was rent, and the dishevelled mazes of her hair, which, all unloosed now, seemed to enfold her with a sable veil or grief, my compassion gave way to alarm. I thought upon the many deeds of desperation which have been dared by such as her, and for no other cause ; of the life-strings which, in sober truth, have been thus rent or dis-severed, with the incredulous world smiling on, all the while, in sarcastic abstraction ; and—I trembled.

"Dear Miss Lavinia, indeed, I must call some one. Let me send for your maid?"

"No, no," cried she, "it is over now, it really is. Lend me your hand a moment. See, I can stand up perfectly well."

"Yes; but you are very weak. Sit down there, for a few moments, on the sofa. Are you subject to those fearful attacks?"

"No, not exactly—but once or twice of late, they have come upon me in this way. I really am quite ashamed of myself, but I hardly know now what has happened, or what I may have said. Pray, pray, don't tell mamma."

"I will not, indeed, but upon one condition."

"What may that be?" inquired she, in almost child-like anxiety.

"That you will really tell me how I can assist or comfort you? All this is much more serious than your mother can think."

"I believe it is," replied she. "I know that they consider it a crime that my heart is faithful and true. But it is no matter. It may

all come to an end sooner than they imagine, and then, they will be at rest and I too."

"But it really is sad," resumed I, "that you should have no one near you in whom you could confide. Have you no friends that I could invite to meet you here?"

"None—at least, none that you know."

"Do not you think that Lady Camilla Dareall might be persuaded to join you, were she aware that you are so unwell?"

A smile of peculiar radiance was Lavinia's first reply, but it soon died away as she mournfully exclaimed:

"Dear Cammy would be delighted to come, but mamma would never allow it."

"How could she prevent my inviting anyone here whom I wish to see?"

"I do not know, but I am afraid she would; or perhaps go back to London."

"But that would be rather what you wish, would not it?"

"Well, it would indeed, to be sure."

"Then look here, Miss Vinny, we may a

well try the venture. I dare say that you will induce Lady Camilla to propose herself for a few days, either directly or indirectly? In mere civility, I should be bound to accede, and you would be sure then of meeting her here, or of being relieved from your present durance."

"It is very kind of you, it really is, and I will think it over. Now, I had better run up to my room quietly, for fear any one should come and guess something from my present appearance."

"Settle your hair a little, first."

"My hair? What has happened to it? Goodness gracious! what a state it is in!" continued she, with a deep blush, when she became conscious for the first time, of its fascinating confusion. In a moment, the truant masses were captive again, and her bonnet effectually concealed all traces of the passing disarray.

"You look almost yourself, now."

"I feel so—that is my late self."

“When shall we cure you quite?”

She fixed her speaking eyes upon me with great earnestness, as she replied—

“You will not cure me.”

“We must try at all events.”

“Take care that you do not bring on the end instead of the cure.”

## CHAPTER V.

So implicitly did I comply with Miss Dieaway's request, that her mother, as well as everyone else in the house, remained completely ignorant of the fainting fit. Nor was my discretion unacknowledged, for, during that evening, Miss Vinny, though paler than was her wont, and evidently suffering from a feverish cold, showed herself more courteous and even cordial in her manner towards me than she had been as yet. When she retired to rest, for the first time she frankly extended her hand to me;—nay, more, while following her mother to the door, she dropped her handkerchief



and, as I stooped to pick it up, she gently whispered—

“I am so much obliged to you for having kept my secret so well. Shall I really tell Cammy to write to you?”

“By all means,” replied I.

She silently placed her forefinger upon her lips to enforce continued discretion, and light-somely tripped after Lady Edward.

Nor was this all. Contrary to my expectation, Hebe was actually in the breakfast-room before me on the following morning.

“You seem surprised to see me,” said she, as I entered.

“Not only surprised but angry, very angry indeed,” exclaimed I.

“Why?”

“Because you know very well that you should be taking care of your cold and not increasing it by such imprudence as this. It cannot but have been a painful effort for you to rise so early, being so unwell as you still must be.”

“It did require some courage, to be sure ; but I was afraid that you might miss me.”

“Or, perhaps, that mamma might scold you.”

“Now that is most ungrateful,” replied she, smiling very attractively. “I have a great good mind to go and breakfast in my room, and leave you to make your tea for yourself. It would serve you quite right. It so happens that mamma particularly desired me not to hurry down to-day.”

“Ah ! just so. We can now tell why you are so very punctual.”

“Very well—very well,” said Hebe, tossing her fairy head ; “you shall see what tea you will have after all this, besides what is in store for you when Cammy comes.”

“You are very fond of her, aren’t you ?”

“I am, devotedly.”

“You look quite another person since you hope to see her again so soon.”

“It has, indeed, revived me most astonishingly. I wonder if you will like her. She is not quite in the common way, you know.”

"So I have heard. Is she good-looking?"

"I think so, very, and so do many others; but some people do not admire her. She has a very off-hand way; but her heart is as true as gold. I daresay you know already that mamma cannot bear her. How will they get on here together, that's the question?"

"I suspect that they will not have much opportunity for quarrelling."

"Why not? Do you think that mamma will return to town?"

"Very likely; but you must know best."

"You see, mamma hates and detests a move most thoroughly; so that, after all, I daresay that, when the first shock is over, of the two evils, she will prefer staying on here. At all events, I hope so."

"You hope so, Miss Vinny? How very polite we are this morning. I perceive that mamma's scoldings have not been thrown away."

"Mamma's scoldings happen to have nothing whatever to do with it. If Cammy Dareall

comes, existence will be just supportable here, that is all. But, I say, you must give us a little tolerable weather."

"I am doing my best; you may observe that there is an improvement to-day."

"It does, indeed, feel a little more genial."

In such guise, Miss Vinny and I conversed on, long after my breakfast had been finished, and even when we subsequently met, whether in the presence of her mother or alone, there was a frank cordiality in her manner, which contrasted very favourably with the frigid reserve of her previous bearing. This Lady Edward did not fail to observe with much satisfaction, for all hostilities were suspended on her side, and were certainly not resumed on any other.

The evening post of the third ensuing day brought me, among several letters, one in an unknown, and rather singular hand. When I opened it, I was not a little perplexed, for it seemed to have neither date, nor signature, nor beginning, nor end. Deeming it to be a

communication from one of my poorer tenants, I applied myself diligently to ascertain the recondite sense, but my utmost attention was at first unavailing. I soon satisfied myself, however, that it was but a fragment or portion of some mysterious whole, and that the first line of the first page contained the conclusion of a sentence, the former part of which must have been consigned elsewhere. What I read was to the following effect:—

“——very different from what I had imagined. I had supposed, by all that I had heard of his style of life, that he was a churlish, odious, insufferable customer, rather older than the hills, and quite to be detested altogether. And now it turns out that he is ‘not old at all,’ not ‘ugly at all,’ only ‘sensible and sedate looking,’ like one who has gone through much sorrow and disappointment, and that, ‘when he does smile, his smile is so beaming and intelligent.’ Upon my word, Miss Vinny, the sooner I come your way the better, I verily believe, for heaven only knows what

may not happen with all these breakfastings alone.—”

My studies were here interrupted by the slight pressure upon my hand of a little forefinger, which was immediately afterwards raised, to betoken the necessity of great caution. Miss Lavinia was sitting close by me, near the table, upon which our letters were usually laid, while her mother, for whom that post had brought nothing, was standing with her back towards us by the fireside. My fair neighbour was apparently in some perplexity similar to my own, for several well-covered sheets of note paper were lying before her, the connection between which she was endeavouring to determine.

“There must have been some mistake,” whispered she. “This note is for you, at all events, and I miss one sheet of Cammy’s letter to me. Let me look at what you have here. Why surely that is her hand.”

“How has it come under cover to me?”

“She must have put a sheet of her letter to

me in your envelope instead of her note to you which she has enclosed with the rest of her letter to me."

"You seem very confidential, you two over there," exclaimed Lady Edward, without approaching nearer to us.

Another sign from Vinny's ready finger warned me to tell the whole truth, or something very like it, at once, and I replied :

"Miss Vinny is kindly helping me to decipher a communication which I have just been so fortunate as to receive from a fair lady. The fact itself appears more complimentary than the tenour, yet I cannot but be grateful for the *ensemble*. I must read it to you, and we shall see if you will guess whence it comes."

"MY DEAR SIR,—

"Though I know nothing of you, and the little I have heard is scarcely to your advantage, I venture to take the liberty, and so forth, of proposing to go over and spend a few days with you. Should my society afford

you any pleasure, you are heartily welcome to it ; and should it be otherwise, all I can say is, that those who turn their houses into gaols, must expect an occasional inroad into them. As I could not dream of giving you the trouble of an answer, I shall start the day after to-morrow, and the distance across country not being very considerable, I shall hope to be with you before dinner. Mind you do not wait for me, as I may be late.

“Very truly yours,

“CAMILLA DAREALL.

“P.S.—Pray do not let my room be too hot ; and I should like, if possible, to be very near Vinny.”

As I had occasionally raised my eyes, while deciphering the foregoing, I had observed that those of my cousin were actually expanding with astonishment and indignation, and no sooner had I concluded, than she exclaimed—

“Well, I do think that this is just the most consummate piece of impertinence that I ever read or ever heard of. How do you mean to reply to it?”



"Happily, no answer is required."

"But an answer is required, most peremptorily required, and I can see but one that would meet the case."

"What might that be?"

"Simply to return what you there hold to Lady Camilla Dareall, with your compliments, and regret that you cannot afford her any clue to the authorship of so impertinent a forgery."

"I do not see," observed I, "how that would prevent her from coming to-morrow."

"It is the day after to-morrow that she mentions."

"Yes; but the letter being dated yesterday, she will leave Dreadnought to-morrow morning, probably before any answer of mine could start from this."

"Very well; I wish you joy of your visitor, that's all. She may rely upon one thing, at any rate—that she will find neither Vinny nor me here."

"My dear Emily!" exclaimed I, "that

would be too cruel. Why am I to be punished where I am thoroughly innocent?"

"I shall be as sorry to go as you can well be to lose us; but I am determined, if possible, to put a stop to this disreputable acquaintance for Vinny. At what hour are the trains for London?"

"Why, to reach town to-morrow, you should leave this at seven in the morning."

"Very well. Run upstairs, Vinny, and tell Clarges to begin packing directly."

"Certainly, dear mamma," replied her daughter, with the greatest eagerness; "and, perhaps, I had better stay and help her, as we have no time to lose."

If the joyous alacrity here displayed by Vinny was at all assumed, she thus evinced a very accurate sense of what the emergency required. I had observed, from the first, that no little hesitation lurked behind the determination so boldly expressed by Lady Edward, and when we were left alone together, she was not slow to betray it more fully.

"What a detestable, odious girl that Cammy is, to be sure! To think that when we were so happy and doing so well, she should have it in her power to unsettle everything again!"

"I am too interested to be impartial in the matter," rejoined I. "But if I might hazard an observation, I would just remark that, by returning to London now, you would yourself defeat the whole of your original plan."

"So Vinny seemed to think, at all events. Did you perceive with what good will she ran off to that odious packing, which she generally hates just as devoutly as I do?"

"I could not but be struck with her *empressement*."

"It is not so much the return to town, though I should be most sorry to leave you; it is to know what on earth I shall do, when I am there, to separate Vinny from those dreadful people! Surely, never was an unfortunate mother tried as I am."

Thus did Lady Edward and I continue to

canvass the various bearings of the contingency at hand, and I felt pretty well satisfied, ere she left me, that, for one day at least, the departure would be adjourned.

Miss Vinny was in great spirits on the following morning, and decidedly more affable than I had ever found her as yet. Not so her mother, who sent me word that she was too unwell to appear at luncheon, but that she hoped to see me in her room, at about five o'clock. She then informed me that if I could devise any means to bring Lady Camilla's visit to a speedy issue, she might still claim my hospitality for a short time; but should the unwelcome guest prolong her stay, I must expect to lose the society of my fair relatives. I promised to do all that courtesy would allow to avert the threatened doom; nor was this the only trouble entailed upon me by the prospective invasion. I had a very warm encounter indeed to sustain with Mrs. Peach, and was actually called upon to hold Mrs. Roberts's head during a series of

convulsions. Again, however, Miss Susan was my true friend in need. When I thought it right to cast a hasty glance myself at the fresh room in course of preparation, there I found her, singing more cheerfully than ever, over her busy work.

“More company, Sir Charles—more company,” chirped she; “I’m all ready for them. It’s no more than should be in such a house as this. I knew that one would bring on the other, just like the articles in ‘the house which Jack built.’”

“Then I see, Susan, that you expect plenty more. Do not mention that below stairs, if you please.”

“Indeed, you may depend upon that, Sir Charles, or we should have murder. They are all so precious delicate. Lackaday! I wish they had my work to do, that’s all.”

“You are none the worse for it as yet, I am happy to see, Susan.”

“No, Sir Charles; but the better. I likes them London people, for my part I do. The

mother is delicate, to be sure ; and so she has a right to be, if she chooses, in her situation ; but it's little trouble that she gives, after all. As to Miss Vinny, that's an angel, and nothing else. I loved her, in my heart, from the first day, when she said to me, in her soft, little way, 'Susan, would you be so good as to let me have some rain-water : the other is very hard.' And plenty of it too she has got since, poor dear. While I'm here, her beautiful skin, which is as white as ivory, with all the blue veins through it, shan't be hurt by the hard water. And to think of her having to cry away half the night, until she heerd her friend was coming !"

"And now she is in great spirits again, Susan ?"

"She is, indeed, Sir Charles ; God bless her ! and it is time she should be, and to be making others cry, instead of herself, which she will do soon enough, I trow, if she has not done so already. And, if I may make

bold to say so, take care you aren't one of them, Sir Charles."

"There is no fear for me, Susan. I'm past all that."

"Oh! I dare say."

The day had been tolerably fine, but, late in the afternoon, the rain came down in torrents. Foreseeing that the fair traveller's speed would scarcely be increased by this untoward change, I had our dinner put off for nearly half an hour, but it was duly concluded, ere Mr. Redhill imparted any notice of an approaching carriage.

"Poor dear Cammy, what a journey she has had," cried her friend. "I must run out and meet her."

"Not at all, not at all," said her mother, impatiently. "Wait at least until she is in the house."

I therefore proceeded alone to the hall door, where I arrived just in time to see an equipage of a very unlooked-for character in the act of drawing up. It was a drag of

great neatness and beauty, with four horses of corresponding appearance, whose harness, and equipment bore full witness to the luxurious good taste of the owner, in the broad glare of two splendid reflecting carriage lamps, notwithstanding the very severe service which had been undergone. So heavy, indeed, was the rain, that it had washed off a considerable quantity of accumulating mud, both from the coach and the smoking steeds, making them show as if a coat of the most brilliant varnish had just been superadded to the whole. I could discern two figures on the driving box, and two inside. These latter, I was preparing to release, and to welcome in person, when a gay, youthful and aristocratic voice, proceeding from the seat above, suddenly arrested me.

“I say there, show me a light, that’s a good fellow—I’m to get down first.”

“Redhill,” cried I, “lend a hand to that gentleman on the box.”

“I’ll ‘gentleman on the box’ you, when I come down,” continued the voice. “Bring



that light a little nearer, old boy ! If ever I saw such a rattletrap as this for getting up and down ! Where on earth am I to put my foot now ? ”

In the meantime, I could perceive, from under the ample folds of an enormous waterproof driving-coat, a little foot, of extraordinary beauty, encased in a Parisian bottine, of irreproachable make, heaving convulsively in mid-air. I laid it myself on its appropriate resting-place, and immediately afterwards the driver of the equipage, whose slender dimensions contrasted surprisingly with the responsibility of the relinquished task, stood by my side.

“ I really must let Lady Camilla Dareall down,” observed I, addressing the new comer, whose tone seemed to mark that the chief authority resided there.

“ Never mind her ; she’s down already,” was the laughing reply. “ Are you the governor ? ”

“ Yes,” replied I, almost mute with aston-

ishment. "But, surely, you cannot have been driving that four-in-hand in such weather as this?"

"Haven't I though, that's all, and not gone over a single stone, as the ladies inside can tell you."

"I say, don't huwwy yourselves, pway, about letting us down," here exclaimed a voice from within.

This summons drew me again to the carriage door, the window of which was now filled by a still more extraordinary apparition, for, under the shade of a straw bonnet, I beheld a face so well covered with incipient moustache and whiskers, that no doubt could be entertained respecting the sex of the bearer. I should have been paralyzed with astonishment, had not my surprise soon given way to a misgiving of a more painful character.

"Well, if you won't hand the ladies out, I must," said my new acquaintance, laughing most cheerily; and, with the assistance of the

scarcely less-perplexed servants, she opened the door and let down the steps. Thereupon, the young man in the bonnet, followed by a personage much resembling a lady's maid, slowly and with the greatest *sang-froid*, descended and entered the hall.

"My dear Lady Camilla," said I, at length, "may I venture to ask whom I have the pleasure of receiving here?"

"A fine, tall young lady, isn't she? Come, don't look so awfully alarmed, and you shall hear all about it. You see, Lady D., that is, Lady Dreadnought, my mamma, my step-mamma, you know, had no objection to my coming over, because she will get rid of me for a few days; but she wouldn't hear of my travelling alone with my maid across country, so she insisted upon my bringing this relative of mine, to take care of me. Allow me to introduce—Sir Charles Rockingham, Lord Walter Dieaway, my cousin;—Lord Walter Dieaway, Sir Charles Rockingham."

Ere I could collect my scattered faculties, I

heard a gentle voice behind me, enquiring if anything had happened ; and, a moment afterwards, the two young friends were locked in each other's arms. The loving epithets and expletives thereupon exchanged, baffle all attempts at enumeration and description, and appeared to me to comprise, not only the principal affectionate expressions of the recognized language, but also several denominations of the poultry-yard.

'Cammy, you darling Cammy,' 'Vinny, you dearest Vinny,' 'My precious angel,' 'my own ducky doo,' 'my imprisoned chicken,' 'my treasure of a little bantum,'" and so forth.

"And let us see how she looks after all the horrors that she has undergone," said Lady Cammy, when the first outburst was over. "Pale and thin enough, to be sure, and small wonder ; but happily, we have consolation at hand."

"So I see," cried Vinny, clasping frantically in her arms—no, not the personage

you are pleased to imagine, but another whom I have not sufficiently noticed as yet—"My darling Billy—my precious little jewel of a dog—he is looking prettier than ever, with his mournful, black eyes. There cannot be another like him in all Skye."

"Oh! yes, I have brought Billy," said Lady Camilla, "and he nearly broke his darling little neck trying to scramble up the box after me. But there is some one else, too—just look behind you."

"Cammy, Cammy, what shall I do?" exclaimed Lavinia, well nigh fainting again with terror and emotion—"what am I to do?"

"Do?—why, go and shake hands with your cousin, to be sure, and say that you are delighted to see him, which you well know you are, you little witch."

"Yes; but mamma, dear Cammy?"

"Oh, yes! mamma, dear Vinny, to be sure. Take care she don't send you to bed without your supper. It so happens, however, that she need not be thinking things, nor you

neither. The plain, homely truth is, that Lady D. would not hear of my coming alone, with my maid, and so this scamp was deputed to take care of me."

"And who is to bear this tale to mamma?"

"Who?" responded Cammy—"you—I—he, or anybody. You had better run in to her, at once, Walter, and take her by storm."

"I have not the slightest objection," was the impassible rejoinder; "but I must beg leave to observe that I cannot make myself agreeable to the ladies until I have washed my hands and partaken of some wefweshment. Show us the bed-wooms, there's a good fellow, and order us something substantial, as we are pwecious hungwy."

"Most certainly," answered I; "but, in the meantime, Lady Edward should be made aware——"

"Of course, you are perfectly wight. But you know all the circumstances, and are quite at liberty to mention them."

"Ha! ha! ha! very good, so he is,"

chimed in Lady Cammy. "Mind you don't make a mess of it: he's over here by Lady D.'s orders to take care of me—not for anything else, by no means, Now, come along, Walter; that old gentleman over there seems to be waiting to show us the way, and you will have plenty of time afterwards to talk with Vinny."

Mr. Redhill, however, was waiting, not to usher the company upstairs, but to gain access to my private ear for a moment.

"I beg your pardon, Sir Charles," said he, most dolefully, "but there is no room prepared for this gentleman, nor for his valet—whom nobody noticed, at first, on the seat behind—nor for the groom, who was on the box by the lady."

"Well! but, Redhill, there are rooms enough, God knows. Speak to Mrs. Roberts."

"It is no use, Sir Charles—it's no use on earth: she has just gone and overthrown a kettle of boiling water upon her feet, and the

hysterics is on her very bad. And then, there is Mrs. Peach by your leave, Sir Charles, who says she must say a word to you immediately. She is waiting at the corner of the passage."

"She must wait that's all, Redhill : I really must attend to the company first. Send me up Susan."

But Susan, who had the happy art of never being in the way, nor out of the way, was now heard to exclaim from the landing place :

"I am here ready, Sir Charles."

And so she had been, I make no doubt, ever since there had been any perceptible stir below.

"You must allow me, Lady Camilla," resumed I, "to apologize to you, at once, for all present and future discomforts you must expect to find under an old-fashioned bachelor's roof. Such as it is, your room is ready for you, I know. As to Lord Walter, perhaps he will allow me to offer him my dressing-room, until something can be prepared for him."

"Lord bless you ! never mind us," answered the light-hearted Lady Camilla ; "anything



will do for us ; we don't care. To the right now, is it? That's a splendid room—fit for a queen. But, I say, where is Vinny's ?”

“The third door to the left, in the passage opposite.”

“Oh! that will never do; that's twice too far. Here, Walter, you had better take this room, and Vinny and I can hang out together; can't we, darling?—I should hope so. Now, what is your name, my good woman?”

“Susan, your ladyship.”

“Then, Susan,—I see that we shall be intense friends by your face—just hop down, will you—find out my maid, and bring her up to Miss Lavinia's room. Tell her to make haste, as I must change everything, for I am desperately wet.”

“I am afraid, Lady Camilla,” interposed I, “that you two will be very uncomfortable in that room, which, in fact, is part of Lady Edward's apartment.”

“Never mind that; trust to me for barring her out effectually, that's all. But, I say, we

are splendidly provided for up here now, and she must be thinking that we are all dead, for the least. Go down, there's a good man, and make it all clear to her while we are dressing."

"And you needn't mob us neither during the wewfeshments," added Lord Walter. "We will join you all in good time; and I am sure that we will find that you have stated ewewything vewy cowwectly. It would be wick to hear him explaining though, wouldn't it, Cammy?"

"Incomparable."

My predominant feeling being likewise to give Lady Edward, as soon as possible, some account of what was occurring, I had little leisure to reflect, as yet, upon the very remarkable and, to me, very novel assurance and *sang froid* displayed by the new-comers. Deferring, therefore, until a more seasonable opportunity, any meditations on this head, I hurried down to join my cousin; but I was arrested at the bottom of the stairs by the inevitable Mrs. Peach in person.

"I must have a word with you, Sir Charles," said she, doggedly.

"Then let it be a short one, pray, for I have no time to lose."

"Nor I neither, Sir Charles. Am I to understand that I am to be hexpected to send up two dinners to the parlour a-day now?"

"Not by any means that I know of Mrs. Peach."

"Well then, Sir Charles, no sooner was your dinner over to day then I gets a message to say that another dinner is wanted up immediately."

"Not at all, not at all; anything that is ready will do."

"But there's nothing ready, Sir Charles, nothing that can come up creditably to you, Sir Charles, nor to me, Sir Charles."

"Well, never mind the credit, so that these poor starving people have something to eat. The time that we are wasting here would be amply sufficient to provide for them."

"All this won't do, Sir Charles, it won't do at all. You will bring the 'termination upon me as sure as we are both standing here. What with the company that's hinvited and them that makes free to come without hinvitation and without notice, this place is becoming too 'ot for me, and rayther too lively."

An impatient rejoinder was upon my lips, but I was arrested by the shadowy appearance of a fresh figure in the back ground.

"Beg pardon, Sir Charles," said Mr. Roundhead, my coachman, breaking in upon us, "but was this here gemman with the team expected?"

"No, Roundhead, not exactly; but as he is come, we must take care of him, and of his horses too."

"But is them 'orses to eat corn with my 'orses, Sir Charles?"

"Of course, to be sure; there are oats enough for them, I should hope."

"There's oats enough, Sir Charles, and to spare; but its biled barley the man wants, and

bran mashes ; and, besides, my straw's running so scarce, that I can 'ardly make up beddin' enough for my own 'orses."

"Well, give all you have for to-night, and we can get more up from the farm to-morrow. By heavens ! here is Lady Edward herself coming to see what can have happened, and no wonder."

## CHAPTER VI.

My first care was to apologize to my cousin for having been detained so long away from her, and to assure her that nothing sinister had occurred ; but the intelligence I had to communicate to her, so soon as the drawing-room door was closed behind us, very far surpassed her worst anticipations. She clasped her hands, started back, and her dark eyes actually grew white for a moment with anger, indignation, and dismay.

“ Call Vinny immediately,” cried she, in the first moment of excitement ; “ she shall not see them—she shall not go near them.”

"My dear Emily," replied I, soothingly, "do be calm; remember that they have already met, and have been talking together for the last ten minutes."

"Then Vinny shall pack off to her room, and stay there till we go; for go, I will, to-morrow, dead or alive."

"As to locking up poor Miss Vinny in her room," observed I, "you would scarcely gain much, for Lady Camilla Dareall has already taken joint possession of it; and as to a premature return to London, I must repeat my increased conviction, that you will thereby be defeating your own object, and fully securing theirs."

"But what on the whole earth can be worse," shrieked my distracted cousin, "than to have them all three pent up in this house together?"

"The evil, though a great one, may be temporary here, and the remedy nearer at hand. I am master of this house, and mean to remain so. If you will be guided by me,

we may yet avert what you now fear, without incurring the risk of provoking something far worse."

"What can be worse?"

"What can be worse, my dear Emily? Remember that you have to deal with an impetuous and inexperienced girl, apparently wedded for the hour to those whose advice will be none of the most judicious, and that she may too easily be impelled to some desperate act."

My cousin had too much knowledge of the world not to feel the force of these simple observations; but, unfortunately, her first fevered impulse in favour of the strongest measures only gave way to a corresponding extremity of depression.

"To think that it should have come to this, already to this, between Vinny and me! After the years that I have spent in fostering that only-spared child, with no other care, with no other fear, with no other hope in this world, but what centred in her, to be told that I



"Have you made it all clear?" asked Lady Camilla.

"Is it all wight and tight?" inquired her cousin.

"Then it could not have been in better hands."

"He is a wegular out and outer at smoothing matters down."

"Allow me to say one word," interrupted I, as seriously as the circumstances would admit, "I have made the best I could for you of a remarkably bad business, but if you expect anything like a cheerful welcome, you are very much mistaken."

"He has made a wetched mess of it, after all, I suspect," rejoined the imperturbable Lord Walter.

"So he has," said Lady Camilla, with a prolonged wink. "We shall have to take it in hand ourselves, and the sooner the better."

"I'm weady," answered her cousin, "and we've nothing for it but all to talk vocifewously together. Now, Cammy, let's you and I

make the first wush, while what's his name supports the twembling Vinny."

A moment afterwards, Lady Edward was saluted, and well nigh overwhelmed by the mingled greetings of the two young relatives.

"Dear Lady Edward."

"My dear aunt."

"I'm so twuly happy to see you."

"I am so delighted to meet you."

"No sooner did we hear that you were within weach, than the dwag was ordewed out, that we might pay our wespects to you."

"Neither the weather nor the state of the cross-roads could deter us from coming to you, as you would not come to us."

"You are looking as wosy as day-bweak."

"It is a pleasure to see you so very blooming and well."

But Lady Edward was proof even against the compliments. In chilling silence, and without so much as extending her hand, she awaited the moment when her own voice could in turn be heard, and she then said—

"You will scarcely be surprised to learn, not-

withstanding all this buffoonery, that I am as much annoyed as I am ashamed at seeing you both here. Annoyed at the object and ashamed of the manner."

"My gwacious! this is very stwange," observed the all unmoved Lord Walter; "there must have been some gwoss misconception. I must talk it over with her, Cammy, and weason with her, if necessawy."


"Do, while I show the new music to Vinny."

His lordship seated himself calmly by the impatient Lady Edward, and resumed thus:

"Let's talk it all over like two wational beings. What's wong in the object, and what's wong in the manner?"

"Not satisfied with flying in the face of my well-known wishes, you must needs invade a perfect stranger's house, in a fashion which I cannot but consider as highly discreditable to your family as well as to yourself."

"Well, but that is a most owiginal view of the case. How does it weally stand? Cammy hears that Vinny is vewy unwell in a countwy house, and wishes to come over and see her.



Lady D. thinks that she shouldn't travel without a man of some kind or other. Her brother Dauntless won't hear of coming, so I'm deputed, and here we are."

"Nonsense, nonsense."

"Not nonsense *at all*, the true unvarnished facts. As to Sir Charles he is delighted to see us. We never met before, to be sure, but the better reason for our meeting now. Besides, wasn't he at Oxford with my grandfather."

"Are you sure that it was not with your great grandfather?" interrupted I.

"Perhaps it was; you know best."

"The more these absurdities can be curtailed, the better!" here exclaimed the indignant Lady Edward. "You very well know, Walter, from what has already occurred between us, that certain views which you have been pleased to entertain, or to express, of late, will meet with my most determined opposition."

"What views? — my views respecting Cammy?"

“Cammy ! ridiculous.”

“It’s not widiculous at all ; it’s notowious that I’m in love with Cammy ; and how can you pwevent my following her and twying to make myself agweeable ?”

“I say, spare my blushes over there !” cried Lady Camilla, who, together with Miss Vinny, was evidently watching, in high glee, the progress of the conversation.

“You see, she owns the soft impeachment,” resumed Lord Walter ; “and, as Lady D. approves, I don’t see why it’s not to come off in due time. In the meanwhile, you must consider Cammy and me as wivetted together. I’m in the stwictest charge of her ; and as long as she stays on here, so long must I wemain.”

“You may stay till doom’s-day, as far as I care !” cried Lady Edward ; “for you will not be the nearer us on that account.”

“You are going away ?”

“Yes, we are.”

“Where to ?”

"Wherever we shall be safest from unwelcome intruders."

"Then the dwag will be called into play again, that's all; and it must be a clever fortwess that keeps the dwag out with Cammy on the box. Wherever Vinny goes, Cammy must follow; and wherever Cammy goes, go I must, of course, as I'm in charge; so that, if we part, I twust it won't be for long."

"That remains to be proved. I shall do my duty by Vinny to the utmost of my power; and, if she chooses to bring matters to a rupture with me, the responsibility must rest with her."

"But there is no weason in life for a wup-ture, or anything wesembling it. Cammy and Vinny are cousins and fwiends, and it would be quite pwepostewous to westwict their intercourse. As to my letting Cammy twavel about alone, after having weceived charge of her from Lady D., that's not to be dweamt of; besides, my pwivate feelings for her, which are actually uncontwollable."

“Now, look here, Walter,” rejoined Lady Edward ; “some people can listen to nonsense, and laugh at it, or at those who utter it. I am not so fortunately gifted, and have neither health, spirits, nor self-command enough to bear with such folly as you seem determined to inflict upon me. We now understand each other pretty well. I see that you are resolved to act in defiance of my wishes, and you know that your designs will meet with every opposition which I can possibly offer. Thereupon I shall wish you a very good-night, as it is eleven o’clock. Now, Vinny, you will come up with me, if you please, as we have had giggling enough and to spare for this evening.”

There was no resisting this authoritative mandate, but the unwilling Lavinia was not suffered to depart without receiving from her fair ally a whispered assurance that they would very soon be together again.

No sooner had the door closed upon the retiring figures of the mother and daughter, than Lady Cammy and her cousin communi-

cated their respective impressions by the exchange of a prolonged wink. This eloquent silence was first broken by his lordship :—

“She’s despewate headstwong—that unfortunate woman—to be sure.”

“She certainly is,” was the reply, “but we have got the whiphand of her, for all that.”

“We have indeed, Cammy, and her position is utterly wetched. Now that we have wouted her out in the only wefuge I know of, where she was tolewably safe, she must either wemain on here, and we with her, in the vewy tendewest intimacy, or else she must beat a wetweat, with the dwag immediately in the wear, and wherever she goes, the dwag can follow.”

“I should hope so.”

“I think that she will remain.”

“Vinny thinks so too, but she does not feel very confident.”

“I am sure she dweads London above all things, for the balls and wouts give such opportunities for meeting, and she not pwesent into the bargain.”



“Exactly. She has no choice, however, but between this and London, for she has no other friend’s house open to her but this, except Dreadnought and Languidford; and, as to an hotel by the sea-side, that’s free to all the public, including the drag.”

Lord Walter, who had ensconced himself in a very deep arm-chair, now placed both his heels upon the fire dogs, and proceeded to canvass aloud the probable contingencies at hand.

“The more I weflect upon it, Cammy,” resumed he, “the more it stwikes me that her game will be to stwuggle on here in hopes that what’s his name will hit upon some weceipt or other for getting wid of us.

“Oh! he is much too gentleman-like and well-bred to think of anything of the kind,” responded Lady Camilla, now bestowing her wink upon me. “I can answer for him, any day in the week.”

“So could I for that matter; but, whether or no, we do not compwehend hints, do we, Cammy?”

“It would be impossible to overstate our obtuseness in that line.”

“We are here upon business ; and business first, we cweation afterwards, is my pwinciple ; so that here we must wemain until we see daylight. You understand this, don’t you, old man ?”

Almost more amused than I was surprised by the nonchalance and thorough self-possession of my visitors, I had forborne, as yet, to interrupt, by any observations of my own, the genial current of their speculations ; but now, that I was so directly appealed to, I could no longer refrain from taking some share in the conversation.

“I can assure you both,” said I, “that nothing could possibly give me greater pleasure than to receive you here at any and at all times ——”

“But,” interposed Lady Camilla, forestalling the adversative conjunction which was already on my lips.

“Just so,” observed his lordship.

"I see," resumed I, "that my thoughts are understood even before they are uttered. This is no time to enter more fully upon them. You are but just arrived, and no one can possibly expect that, before you are duly rested from the fatigues of a very unpleasant journey, I should say anything that could, in any way, curtail the pleasure which your stay here would undoubtedly afford me. To-morrow, or the next day, it will be quite time enough to inquire whether some future season might not more appropriately be fixed."

"Oh, not at all—not at all!" cried Lord Walter; "there is no season like the present for friends to meet."

"A thousand things might happen," added Lady Camilla, "which might prevent our return."

"Well, well," resumed I, "we can discuss that point in a day or two, and I trust, at all events, that I shall be able to acquit myself of any want of courtesy or hospitality in the suggestions which I may have to make."

"Vewy well, vewy well; we can, at any wate, hear what he may have to say in his defence, can't we, Cammy?"

"We can."

"He has an undoubted wight to a heawing."

"He has, indeed; but as he suggests himself, that another time would be more appropriate for looking into the matter, I think I shall wish you both good-night, and go and see after my darling Vinny. I have a shrewd suspicion that somebody is taking this opportunity of-worrying her while my back is turned."

"Ah! to be sure," cried her cousin. "I dare say your pwesence up stairs is very much wquired."

"But I say," observed the departing Lady Cammy, "mind you two don't go on with that other matter, while I am not there to put in my word."

"Oh no, that's pwowogued for several days, at least, by our worthy fwiend and host's especial desire."

“You can tell him all about our journey, to-day; it will amuse him, and keep him quiet.”

I was, indeed, curious to know for what reason the singular reversal of parts to which I have alluded, when mentioning the arrival of my visitors, had taken place, and the full particulars were not long withheld.

“It must have appeawed wather stwange to you,” said his lordship, “to see Cammy with the wibbons, and me inside. I must tell you that, above all things in the world, I hate being out in the wain, and, if I had thought it was to have been a wainy afternoon, nothing on earth would have induced me to bwing out the dwag. As it was, however, the morning was bwight; Cammy, who is as headstwong as a mule, swore she must go; Lady D., that’s Lady Dweadnought, you know, who, between you and me and the wall, vewy much pwefers Cammy’s room to her company, would have it that it would be a vewy fine day, and I was pwevailed upon to start against my own

pwivate judgment. The distance, too, had been miswepwesented."

"Ah! how far do you reckon it from here, to Dreadnought?"

"Fwom here to Dweadnought. Why, as the cwow flies, I don't think it can be forty miles; but, by those wetched cwoss-woads, it's a smart fifty."

"Surely, you did not come all the way with the same horses?"

"No; I sent my team on yesterday to the 'Cock and Spawwow,' at Oldbwidge, and Dauntless lent us his so far this morning. This bwoke the journey pwetty well into two, but we made another bweak and west in each half. Well, when we weached Oldbwidge, the wain began to come on most wemarkably. I pwo-posed wemaining on at the 'Cock and Spawwow,' but nothing would serve that fellow Cammy but to pwoceed. I swore I wouldn't dwive; and as Wichard, that's my gwoom, can hardly be twusted for bwinging the team wound fwom the stables, there was

His lordship's valedictory compliments were compressed into a long wink. I responded according to the more prevalent fashion, suggesting, at the same time, that I was in the habit of breakfasting early, but that I trusted he would not hurry.

"Huwwy, man! Lord bless you, no; I shouldn't huwwy were I to bweakfast alone with the Empewor of Austwia."

## CHAPTER VII.

THE following morning was, atmospherically speaking, gloomy and threatening enough, but expectation was hopeful and buoyant within, as, at my appointed hour, I moved towards my breakfast-room. To be sure, when I entered it, there was something rather depressing in the sight of our larger table; yet the additional chairs and cups would be very bearable intruders were my Hebe but as punctual as usual.

Ah! but where was she?

Minute after minute flew by, and no symptom of her approach could be detected by my



anxious senses. At length the door flew open, and a youthful figure bounded into the room ; but it was not her.

Gracious heavens ! do the too fortunate Gods boast of a second cupbearer, endowed with every typical attraction of maidenly grace ; and will she also minister to my solitude ?

“ I hope I am not late,” exclaimed Lady Camilla, rushing up to the clock.

“ No ; and if you had been, I should not have scolded you.”

“ I am not so certain of that, by all I have heard.”

“ Well, I am sure that I did not expect you for more than an hour yet.”

“ No, I dare say not ; but you were expecting some one else, and you will be disappointed. She is not coming.”

“ Indeed.”

“ You need not look so very blank. There is nothing very serious the matter with her ; but we have had a fearful time of it since

last night. As I had more than suspected, Lady E., that's her mamma, you know, took this opportunity of pitching into her, as Dauntless would say. Happily, I came to the rescue, and gave Aunt E. a little piece of my mind, just a small fragment. Still, we had hysterics until near three in the morning, and such a business as it was to get the poor child to sleep, to be sure. I thought all was right and tight again, when, about half-past six, she begins tossing, and tumbling, and vowing that she must get up, or that she would be late for your breakfast."

"That was much too thoughtful of her."

"So I told her, trust to me for that; but it wouldn't serve. 'No, no,' said she, 'I would not miss his breakfast for the world, he that is so kind, and so, I don't know what all; and the only thing he seems to care about, is to have some one to make his tea for him.' I vowed that she shouldn't stir for all that, and she swore she would. At last we compounded: I promised that, if she would go to sleep again,

like a good child, I'd be down in time to make this famous tea for you, and here I am."

"I am more grateful than words can express."

"And well you may be. But, I say, this is no hour for civilized beings to breakfast at."

"Perhaps not; but I find it most convenient for myself when I am alone here; and I can assure you that I never expect anyone to join me, unless they feel so inclined."

"I see; that's more like it. Now we are here, hadn't we better begin. You like your tea pretty strong, I know that."

We sat down together, and a short interval of silence ensued, during which it struck me that the native and cordial assurance of my new companion, which had sustained her very well while she had had something to impart, began to wane a little under the influence of our *tête-à-tête*. Perhaps I should not have availed myself of this opportunity for studying more closely her appearance and countenance; but the fact was, that, since her arrival, I had

been so taken up with sundry other cares, that I had had no previous leisure for this welcome occupation.


There is a natural affinity between the character and the general expression and bearing upon which it is needless to descant; but in none can it be more readily traced than in Lady Camilla Dareall. No one could gaze upon her sparkling blue eyes and beaming complexion—no one could hear, but for once, the joyous tones of her animated voice—without feeling convinced that good-nature and resolution, happily blended, were the foremost traits of her disposition. Her personal attractions are considerable, as great to the taste of many as those of her cousin, but in direct contrast with them. While in Lavinia, all is languor and pensiveness; in Lady Cammy all is decision and frolicsome activity. Vinny's hair is dark—Cammy's is fair; Vinny is tall and slender—Cammy is short, and rather Dutch-built. But the same small sash encircles either waist; either small foot could

dance a hornpipe in Cinderella's slipper ; and the little white hand, which was even now busily officiating in my service, would have been as perfect a model for Canova, as that which it replaced. It is difficult to be in the presence of so many charms and not to gaze—nay, even to muse upon them. At all events, I was yielding, I suppose, to some such temptation when my graceful neighbour suddenly exclaimed, not without a deep blush—

“I say, you will know me again when next we meet. Did you stare in this way at Vinny, when she breakfasted alone with you?”

“Well, I presume not, as she never reproved me for it. Do you object to being looked at?”

“No, not in moderation ; but you see,” continued she, with a strange little laugh, “it is rather queer, we two being alone together. I am not accustomed to this sort of thing : it looks for all the world, as if—as if—in short, never mind.”



"You were going to say, as if we were married."

"Perhaps I was. I do talk such nonsense, you know ; but it is rather like it, certainly."

"With this difference, among others," rejoined I, "that then you would most probably be scolding me for not looking more at you."

"Ah, indeed ; very probably. But I was not scolding you, was I?"

"Something very near it."

"Well, I had no great right to, after all ; you must think me a somewhat strange person."

"Do not ask me to say all I think."

"No, I won't ;—not that anybody ever does. But you see—just give me a little more butter, please—I have such health, and such spirits, I don't know what to do with them."

"A most enviable superfluity."

"I am not so sure of that ; they are quite a nuisance, sometimes. If I was not at mischief from morning till night, and from night till morning, I should be very unwell—I should die."

"You will find plenty of occupation in that line, here."

Upon this observation my companion looked eagerly, almost anxiously, in my face, and then said :

"Mischief or no mischief, I mean to carry my point, I can tell you."

"I am very sorry to hear it."

"Why?"

"Because, I feel sure that anything you undertake must be in a fair way of being accomplished, and, in this case, the success which you contemplate, I venture to deprecate."

"More shame for you. Why do you side against us?"

"Because unfortunately, I have more experience of the world than all three of you."

"What has that to do with it? Aren't all these things a lottery?"

"More or less perhaps; but though you never can be sure of the winning numbers, you may be tolerably certain of those by which you must lose."

"Give me some of that, please, if it is orange marmalade, and expound to me the mystical sense of your last saying."

"Well then, I hold that there are certain requirements which, though they cannot, of course, insure happiness, are deservedly held to be necessary to secure the best chances of it, which human foresight can devise."

"And what may they be?"

"Why, mutual affinity in birth, station, disposition, besides a fair amount of worldly prospects and advantages."

"You could not better have defined the actual features of our case. Equal rank."

"Granted."

"Equal station."

"Granted also."

"Similar dispositions."

"Oh! my dear Lady Camilla."

"Oh! my dear Sir Charles, it is a positive fact. No two human creatures could be better suited in tastes and in character than they are."



“Do you really expect me to believe that there is any natural affinity between Lavinia’s mind and that of your cousin?”

“Vinny may be cleverer and so forth ; but they both hate trouble, hate exertion, are for taking the world as it comes, and will neither of them set the Thames on fire. Besides, Walter will let his wife have her own way in almost everything, which, in my opinion, is just exactly the all-important point. Trust to me, I know them both tolerably well, and can answer for their being suited to a T.”

“Even were it so, which I cannot concede as yet, Vinny, having thirty thousand pounds, might surely look to making a far better match in the eyes of the world.”

“Ah ! I would just reverse that, and say that Vinny, *à la rigueur*, having fortune enough for two, might be allowed to choose according to her own taste. But Walter is not such a pauper, after all, himself ; he has twenty thousand pounds.”

“How much of that has he already spent?”

"How do I know? Two or three, I suppose, and quite right he. What's the use of hoarding?"

"At this rate, I see, there are no objections at all to the connection."

"Of course there are some. We all know that Walter has been a little wild. So are all young men."

"Are they?"

"Are they?" echoed my companion, half smiling and half blushing. "How can I tell? Everybody says they are, and I have no means of contradicting it. Look at my brother Dauntless, for instance. If I were to believe half the stories I have heard of him, I could hardly sit down in the same room with him. Well, he is just reckoned one of the very best matches in England; and, for my part, I don't know a single girl in London who is not beside herself when he waltzes with her."

"He is very good-looking, I suppose?"

"Well, he is that, uncommonly."

"Is he like you?"

“Like me! What nonsense.”

“I was only asking a very simple question.”

“Oh, yes; you are very idiotical:—I saw that from the first. The best of the joke is, however, that I am reckoned rather like him, and we got, in consequence, a splendid rise out of old Dreadnought—that’s our governor, you know.”

“Did you, indeed. How was that?”

“When he came back from India last, where he had been giving the Burmese a piece of old England’s mind, I drove his currie to meet him at the station with one of Dauntless’ hats and overalls. So soon as he made out the carriage and livery, out he came, and you never saw any one start back in the way he did when he faced me. ‘God bless my soul, Dauntless! is that you?’ cried he. ‘Why, you vagabond, I’m —— (I don’t know what) if you have grown an inch since I left England.’ I have laughed occasionally, in my lifetime, but never so much as I did that day. Now, to return to our subject, Walter and

Vinny are both very young, very handsome, over head and ears in love with each other ; there is plenty of money ; I have given my consent, and the thing is to be. That is just the long and the short of it—do you see ?”

“Then, if so, all I have to say is, poor Vinny !”

“Poor Vinny, indeed ! That’s pretty civil by me. I’ll ‘poor Vinny’ you presently for that. In the first place, may I make bold to ask why you call Miss Dieaway ‘Vinny’ at all ?”

“Well, I take that liberty simply because she is my first cousin’s daughter, and that from her childhood I have never given her, nor heard her given, any other name.”

“Ah ! but she’s not a child now, nor you neither ; and as you belong to the enemy, I’m not quite clear that I approve of all this intimacy. If you were one of us, you might ‘Vinny’ her as much as you pleased ; but, as things stand, it’s quite another matter. So, I suppose, it was ‘Vinny’ here and ‘Vinny’

allowing them to drown their wives in sacks. My gracious ! how they are pottering over this war ! If they had given the command to old Dreadnought, he would have been in Moscow by this time, though the man who is out is a true-born Briton, too. You know him, of course ? What a fine-looking fellow he is ! There, take the paper away ; I've done with it. Ah ! staring at me again ; that won't do, you know. You must make yourself agreeable to the ladies. How long is it that you have been staying in this old place ?"

"More than three years."

"Without stirring ?"

"Without stirring."

"And without any company ?"

"Without any company."

"You must have found that tolerably the reverse of chirpy."

"The reverse of what ?"

"Of chirpy. Don't you know what chirpy is ?"

"Indeed, I do not."

"Why chirpy is our new word for cheery, cheerful. What was the fun of boxing yourself up here during the best years of your life? There must have been a reason."

"I suppose there was."

"I suppose there was, indeed. Tell us all about it."

"I am afraid I cannot this morning."

"No, nor this evening neither. Never mind, I dare say that Vinny knows."

"Not that I am aware of."

"Well, if she don't, I do, pretty well. There was love at the bottom of it. Ay, you know very well there was. You need not look so blank; it's all over now. Enchanting girl—beautiful, tender, and true, and plenty of money—Proposed—Faltering acceptance softly whispered—Settlements drawn up—Marriage presents made and blushing accepted. Three days before the blissful date, off she goes with the solicitor's clerk. Awful tableau—pistols loaded, cocked, and discharged. Bullets fortunately omitted. Recovered with sal-volatile. Immured for three whole years under the here-

ditary shades. Tolerably convalescent now ; ready to begin again whenever an opportunity offers, and, in the meantime, grinning like a hyæna in Cammy Dareall's face, over the whole business. That's about it, isn't it, now ?”

“ You are very welcome to think so, at all events.”

“ I wonder what has become of her ?”

“ Of whom ?”

“ The angel, the enchantress, the false one. I'd give something worth having, if she could see you now, laughing at the very recollection of her.”

“ If I am laughing, Lady Camilla, it must be under the genial influence of your conversation !”

“ Thank you very much : I'm not ambitious of exciting ridicule. But haven't I hit it off pretty well ? Now, what on earth shall we do to day ? It looks rainyish, but I must be at something or another. I don't suppose that I slept two hours last night and may be you think I'm tired. Not a bit of it. I'm ready to go to St. Petersburg this very moment.”

There can be no doubt that, whatever may have been the real merit of Lady Camilla's conversational powers, they certainly precluded me from keeping any accurate account with Time, and I could hardly believe that it was considerably past eleven o'clock when the door opened again, and Lord Walter sauntered into the room. His lordship was evidently much refreshed with his night's rest. The bloom of his complexion, his hair, his whiskers, and his whole toilet fully rivalled that of either of my Hebes. He was dressed in a suit of light-blue tweed, picked out with bright-grey, and his cravat, pin, chemise, and pocket handkerchief, all bore sundry designs, very minutely corresponding in shade with the leading colours. When he had nodded his matutinal greeting to his cousin and to me, he sat down to the breakfast table, and resting his chin upon his hand, very attentively considered its promise and that of the neighbouring side-table.

"Vinnny not bweakfasted yet?" was his first observation.



butter. And mind you, Wedhill, I'm as hungwy as a waven, so look alive, old man."

Having thus provided for his immediate wants, my new guest recurred to more general subjects of conversation.

"A dull old shop this, Cammy."

"Horribly."

"I don't think it has stopped waining a minute since we awwived."

"Not a second, that I know of."

"Might as well have boxed up poor Vinny in Newgate, at once."

"Far better, to my mind. She would have been in London, at least."

"I say, Cammy," resumed his lordship, after having despatched his first piece of toast.

"Well."

"Have you spoken to him at all yet?" continued he, slightly protruding his chin in my direction.

"Only a word or two, upon the general merits of the question."

"Nothing yet about himself?"

“Nothing.”

“Nor about his private share in the transaction?”

“No.”

“Then, perhaps, we had better broach the subject at once, while we three are alone together.”

“By all means.”

“Will you begin, Cammy, or shall I?”

“You had better open, and I will follow.”

“Very well. Now you see, my good friend,” continued his lordship, “I put it to you whether we three, that is Cammy, Vinny, and I, have not invariably made it a rule not to interfere in your concerns?”

“Very good,” chimed in Lady Cammy.

“Whether we have ever crossed your path, wrestled your comforts?”—

“Or entered into any conspiracy against your wishes and feelings?”

As I could not but fix my eyes upon Lady Camilla, while she thus addressed me, I observed in hers an expression of almost

irrepressible mischief, tempered by a latent anxiety lest I should misapprehend the real character of this strange interrogatory. I saw enough there to convince me that, had she feared the slightest offence would be taken by me, her whole weight would have been thrown at once into the other scale. But, as I was really amused with the ways and manners of my new guests, I determined to set her mind at rest forthwith, and to give free scope to her prevailing propensity.

“Unquestionably,” replied I; “I can have no such charge to urge against any of you.”

“Then why, may I ask, have you crossed our path?”

“Just so,” observed Lady Cammy.

“Why have you stepped in, in a most incwredible manner, to give us a gweat deal of twouble and annoyance ——”

“To defeat our plans.”

“To fall like a howwid blight upon our pwospects.”

“Capital.”

"And, in short, to make yourself a wegular nuisance."

"Precisely."

"Indeed," interposed I, "nothing could have been further from my thoughts and intentions."

"Ah! but, my good fwiend, thoughts and intentions have vewy little to do with it."

"We all know what place is paved with good intentions," said Lady Camilla.

"It's not the intentions we wegard, it's the wesults, isn't it, Cammy?"

"Undoubtedly."

"And these wesults have been, as yet, vewy far fwom gwatifying to us."

"Very far indeed."

"You are destwoying our London season."

"The part I like best of it, at-all events."

"Sepawating two faithful hearts."

"Precisely."

"And bwinging them to the vewy bwink of the gwave, with disappointment and sowwow."

"Well, assuming these to be the actual re-

sults," observed I, "how far in fairness can I be held responsible for them."

"How far can you be held responsible for them? Well that is wick, isn't it, Cammy?"

"Valuable."

"I am glad to have lived to hear that, aren't you.?"

"Enchanted."

"Now, just for a moment, fancy yourself suppressed, there's a good man."

"Exactly."

"Imagine, for an instant, yourself, this old house, gounds and all, in Austwalia, or at the bottom of the Wed Sea; and ask yourself where we should then be at pwesent, that is, Cammy, Vinny and I."

"Ah! where indeed?"

"Where, but in the gay metwopolis, and meeting at every hour of the day and night."

"In Stanhope Street first," proceeded Lady Cammy, "to inquire for Aunt E. before she was down, or up either, for that."

"Then at luncheon in Gwosvenor Square."

"Then at some déjeuner, or afternoon concert.

"Or widing together in Wotten Wow."

"Then at dinner somewhere."

"Then at the Opewa."

"Then at some ball, waltzing together to the very verge of extinction."

"Or, at worst, at some wout, with the cwoold so intense as actually to compwess us into a jelly."

"And now, instead of this maze of enchantment, why are we beating the high-ways and bye-ways, ready to catch a glimpse of our beloved?" said Lady Camilla.

"Why are we dwenched to the skin one day, and boxed up the next, in this old penitentiawy?"

"With mamma to pry into every word and look."

"Or to turn westive, kick immeasuweably—"

"And, perhaps, bolt at last."

"Well," interposed I, at length, "may I say one word in my defence?"

"You may," was the joint reply.

"Then, I put it to you both, how could I, as the ill-fated master of this ill-fated house, act otherwise than I have done? My cousin, and most valued friend, proposes to make me a visit."

"Hurrah! hurrah!" cried Lady Cammy.

"Huwwah! huwwah!" loudly re-echoed his lordship.

"What piece of good intelligence can I have been so fortunate as to communicate in these few words?" inquired I.

"Something worth hearing, at all events," said Lady Cammy.

"And glowiously pwecious," added her cousin.

"Vinny was right, after all, Walter."

"She was, indeed, the little tweasure."

"We now know, Walter, who started this blessed notion."

"And how much twuth there was, Cammy, in all that wubbish impwessed upon poor Vinny, of not wefusing any longer her Cousin Wock-ingham's wepeated invitations."

"It was all a plant of Aunt E.'s, after all."

"And now we have got at the vewy woots of it."

"May I be heard again?" observed I, anxious to retrieve, as far as I could, the formidable indiscretion into which I had been most unwittingly betrayed. "You appear to labour under a complete misapprehension of my meaning."

"No, we don't," cried Lady Cammy.

"Not a bit of it," said her cousin.

"Excuse me," continued I. "You seem to think that Lady Edward has not only conferred upon me the favour of coming to see me here, but that she also added that of herself originally proposing to do so."

"We don't think it at all, we know it," replied her ladyship. "We have just heard it from your own lips—haven't we, Walter?"

"In the most expvess terms."

"Then," resumed I, "I must most inadequately have conveyed to you my real meaning. The fact is, that, not once, but repeatedly,



have I urged and requested Lady Edward to consider this place as her home."

"When?" cried his lordship.

"Ah! when?" echoed Lady Cammy, triumphantly.

"He's twying to wiggle out of it, Cammy."

"But he won't."

"He has already cut his thwoat from ear to ear."

"And all with his own hand, too, Walter."

"Pardon me again, you funny people!" exclaimed I, "but my case is not at all so desperate yet. I can, most conscientiously, affirm that the invitation to my cousin proceeded originally from myself alone,"

"When?"

"Ah! when?"

"Whenever an opportunity offered. And Lady Edward is no less justified in stating to her daughter that, out of mere regard, kindness, and even civility towards me, a visit was positively due to me."

"Ah! but in this actual instance?" said Lady Cammy.

"Exactly," added his lordship, "we don't want old stowies twumped up. In this actual instance?"

"Well, in this actual instance, it was I myself who fixed the very day and date on which I hoped to receive my kind visitors."

"Oh! ah! to be sure. But whose was the original idea of timing that visit just at present?" inquired Lady Cammy.

"Just so," added her cousin. "Whose was the pwimitive letter and whose the weply?"

"That would be no very easy question to answer," said I, "considering that my cousin and I have been in pretty constant, and I may also add, rather private correspondence during the last twenty years."

"I suppose that we had better let him off, Walter?" observed Lady Cammy.

"I pwesume so, and all the more that we have a vewy good case against him either way."

"How can that be?" observed I.

"Explain it to him, Cammy, there's a good

fellow," said Lord Walter ; " it is so onewous talking in this way all the time of one's bweak-fast !"

" I'll make it clear to him," answered his cousin, " never fear. Either you yourself originated the whole of this precious scheme and must, therefore, be held responsible for it ; or else you were made aware of its object and have entered into it as an accessory."

" May not it be just possible, my dear Lady Camilla," observed I, " that I knew nothing whatsoever respecting the true state of affairs until Lady Edward and her daughter were both here ?"

" Do you expect us to believe that ?" said Lady Cammy.

" I do, indeed, for it is the real truth."

" Well, then," resumed she, " you cannot, at all events, now plead ignorance of the true character of this transaction."

" This most nefawious twansaction !"

" And we have a right to expect that you will do your utmost to restore things to their proper footing."

"Let me hear, at any rate, what I am expected to do."

"What you are expected to do!" replied Lady Cammy. "Why, to make it clear to Aunt E., of course, that this is no time of year for visits in the country, and that she is in duty bound to return to London immediately, with her daughter, for the season."

"Cammy," observed his lordship, scarcely audible from the quantity of buttered toast which he was at that moment discussing.

"What's the row?" responded she.

"It is not absolutely necessawy that Lady E. herself should weturn to town."

"Of course, to be sure not, Walter."

"Because, if it were gwatifying to her to witness here the first bweak of spwing, far be it fwom us to pweclude her from doing so. Lady D., you know, is vewy willing to take charge of Vinny, and the dwag could cawwy us all thwee, either back to Dweadnought or to town, diwect."

"A very excellent suggestion," said Lady

Camilla. "Now, Sir Charles, let's hear your private opinion upon the matter."

"I wish to express none," observed I, "saving to entreat you to consider the peculiar difficulties under which I labour. It is clearly impossible for me, in common courtesy, to say anything which would tend to curtail the stay of my visitors here."

"Did you hear that, Walter?" cried Lady Cammy.

"Vewy distinctly."

"It is a very valuable admission that, Walter, and each of the words should be stenographed."

"And steweotyped afterwards."

"He both feels and declares that, as a gentleman, he could not utter a single syllable which could tend to shorten the stay of any of his guests."

"He is far too well bwed to think of that."

"Indeed," continued I; "You could not possibly overstate my reluctance to do anything of the kind, especially in the case of

those whom I have repeatedly and pressingly invited here. My sincere wish is to satisfy all parties, and to do my duty by each and everyone."

"I give you full credit for the sentiment," responded his lordship; "and such being the case, you must remember that Vinny, being the principal sufferer, has also the principal claim upon you for redress. We collect, Wokingham, that you have no right whatsoever to subject her to imprisonment."

"None in the world," chimed in Lady Cammy; "it is quite a question whether you have not already put yourself in the power of the law as it is."

"Very probably indeed, for, I repeat it, you have no more right to imprison her than you would have to transport her or to hang her."

"Rather less," said his cousin, "for either course would be more humane than the present."

"You know, my good friend," continued his lordship in the same amicably didactic tone,

"Well, there is some truth in that, to be sure. Poor Vinny, can't certainly endure the smell of a cigar."

"No, but we collect Cammy we must twy and weconcile her to it. There will be a pwecious deal of smoking when we shall have weached the blessed term of all our sowwows."

"Ah! but we have not reached it yet," replied Lady Cammy, in her own tone of playful authority, "and the sooner you reach off with that lighted cigar of yours, the better for yourself and for others. Come, away with you: I want to have some private conversation with Mr. Calcraft."

"When do you think Vinny will be down?" said his lordship, from the door-way.

"How can I tell? None the sooner for your staying. Now, be off."

## CHAPTER VIII.

So soon as we were alone together again, Lady Camilla sprang from her arm-chair, and looking up at me with an air in which all the frolicsome spirit of her nature seemed concentrated, she said—

“We are queer people, aren’t we?”

“You certainly are.”

“Very queer people?”

“Very queer people.”

“Did you ever see such people before?”

“Never.”

“Nor hear of them?”

“No.”

“Nor read of them?”



"No."

"Did you think there were such people in existence?"

"I did not, indeed."

"That's all right; our ambition is to be original. If we were shown at a fair, we would fetch money, wouldn't we?"

"One of you would, certainly."

"Which?"

"Never mind which."

"Ah, you mean Walter, I see! Well, isn't he amusing, and isn't he good looking?"

"He certainly is both, in a way."

"So tall, so well got up, so shiny, so short-sighted! And did you remark his pretty little hands and feet?"

"I did not, indeed."

"More shame for you."

"Perhaps it was not his hands that I was admiring," said I, taking a very diminutive one, which was resting on the chimney-piece close by mine. I was even meditating whether I might venture to raise it still further

to my lips, when the fair owner, suddenly withdrawing it, exclaimed—

“You had better mind what you are about: it hits uncommon hard, that hand does.”

“How I should like to try!”

“Then you shan’t.”

“So I ought to have admired Lord Walter’s hands and feet. Are such matters of much importance in a man?”

“I don’t know. Rather, I should say. Your’s are not so bad, but you should not wear such outrageously thick boots.”

“You have already observed that?”

“Yes, and much more about you.”

We were still whiling the rainy morning away in some such guise when we were joined by Miss Dieway.

“Oh! you dear treasure, there you are at last,” exclaimed Lady Camilla, embracing her friend repeatedly, “and you too, Billy, my blessed little man. How pretty she is looking to day, isn’t she? with her sorrowful eyes.”

“Dear Cammy, what nonsense you do talk.”

"It's nonsense is it? I appeal to the public, represented by Billy and Calcraft."

"By Billy and whom?"

"Calfcraft. We have settled to call him Calcraft, because we consider him as a sort of public executioner."

"What a shame!" exclaimed Lavinia. "I hope you have not been tormenting him."

"Oh, no! by no means—have we, Mr. Calcraft?"

"It strikes me that you can best answer that question, Lady Camilla."

"Well, he has borne it very well, any how. Do you know that I rather like him, Vinny."

"Do you indeed?" replied Miss Vinny, certainly smiling very softly at me. "Didn't I tell you that you would."

Ah! foolish, foolish Charles! Can I recall how gratified thou wert, and the unutterable folly which was even then crossing thy brain, when thou wert rudely recalled to the homely truth.

"Where is he?" resumed Miss Lavinia, *looking languidly around.*

"He is just gone as far as the stables, dearest."

"I think he might have waited until I came down."

"So he certainly would had he followed his own inclination."

"Did you say anything to him about what occurred last night?"

"Only a passing word."

"He was not much upset, I hope."

"No; not much. He got through his breakfast pretty well; but I don't think him quite himself."

"Poor fellow! But have you been smoking here, Sir Charles?"

"No; I have not, I can assure you."

"I hope it was not that naughty Walter."

"He only lit his cigar, darling," eagerly exclaimed Lady Cammy, "but he left the room immediately when he heard that you might soon be coming."

"How like him! he is so considerate! He promised me that he would give up smoking before long."

"It will be a very great sacrifice to him," observed Lady Cammy for the first time avoiding to encounter my glance.

"I know it will, dearest, and that is one of my reasons for requiring it. Now, what shall we do to day?"

"Ah! indeed—what shall we? What do you propose, Mr. Calcraft? It rests with you to amuse your company."

"I am sure I do not know what to offer, except the prints in the library, or a game at billiards."

"Oh, billiards!" cried Lady Cammy, "I am a nob at billiards. Are you, Mr. Calcraft?"

"You had better try, Lady Camilla."

"Well, come along with you. But here's Walter."

When, on entering the room, his lordship beheld Miss Dieaway, he rushed up to her, pressed her hands several times to his lips and poured forth his morning salutations with extraordinary volubility.

"So you are there, are you, my tweasure, my wose, my gewanium, my heliotwope, my ewevy thing that's charming.

"Now, Walter," interposed she, "I cannot allow you to talk thus. One would think I was a flower bed—I really shall be quite angry with you—and before strangers."

Miss Vinny had coloured very much, but she did not as yet seem very angry.

"There are no stwangers here, my tweasure: Cammy knows all about it and so does Calcwaft. We have no twuer fwriends in the world than Cammy and Calcwaft; so why am not I to call you before them my own pwecious Vinny."

"Because I am not that yet."

"No; but, since Cammy says it is to be, it is as sure as a gun. And full time it should be," added his lordship mournfully; "for me at least."

"You have not been quite yourself of late I hear, dear Walter," replied Miss Lavinia, sadly. "You do look rather thinner, to be sure."

"Thinner? I'm fast weducing to a shadow. I weigh thwee pounds less than I did six months ago."

"That may be the hunting, you know," observed Lavinia with a most provoking smile.

"The hunting!" muttered his lordship indignantly. "I have not been out thwee times this season. Cammy don't attwibute it to the hunting, do you, Cammy?"

"Don't ask me, Mr. Impudence," was the reply. "I'm for attributing off to the billiard-room with Calcraft."

"A vewy good move; and Vinny and I will wemain on here."

"No, you won't," cried Lady Cammy; "I don't mean to lose sight of you, I can tell you. Come, march on."

"You have no idea how wetchedly cold the billiard woom is, Vinny," remarked his lordship feelingly.

"How do you know, you silly boy? You have never been there yet."

"Pewhaps not ; but ewevy billiard-woom is a howwidly cold place."

"Mine looks to the south," observed I, "and as there is a good fire in it, I trust that you will not suffer so much as you apprehend."

"Well, then, let's move on," said his lordship ; "only I must have some pwivate conversation in a wemote corner with Vinny. I want to wemonstwate with her upon these immodewate cwyings of hers. I shouldn't cwy for all of them put together ; its only ensuwing them an additional twiump'h."

So genial and incessant, in her peculiar style, was Lady Camilla's conversation, and so animated were our successive games, that the dreaded\_morning flew away, in my estimation, at least, with the greatest rapidity. Nor did its course seem slower or more irksome in the eyes of the two youthful lovers who occupied the furthestmost end of the furthestmost bench. From what I could not but occasionally overhear of their conversation, it seemed to me to consist in a series of very pointed compliments,



on one side, and of rather feeble deprecations on the other, the subject matter still giving equal satisfaction to both.

As Lady Edward did not grace our luncheon with her presence, the same topic was then very freely re-introduced. This time, Miss Dieaway's repugnance to become the sole theme of the general discourse was sincere and clearly manifested; but it was of no avail. A summary review of a few of the London beauties having been instituted by Lady Camilla, several opportunities occurred for contrasting their attractions with hers, nor was one of them neglected.

"Minnie Townshend!" would Lady Cammy say; "she's a pretty girl, to be sure, in a way; but the wretched creature is so scraggy. Look at Vinny's shoulders and waist—that's what I call shape."

"She's built like all the Gweek statues," observed his lordship.

"Now, Walter, cried his cousin, "I shall be seriously angry if you do not talk of somebody else but poor me."

"What's the wow? We were only wewewing to Minny Townshend, weren't we, Cammy?"

"To be sure. I suppose we may talk of Minny Townshend, and of Selina Apsley, too, for all that. A poor figure she would make without her curls."

"Her hair is pwetty enough, but nothing like Vinny's."

"I am afraid that you must think Vinny a great fool for listening to such nonsense!" exclaimed the personage alluded to, now really displeased. "If this persecution is to go on, I shall certainly appeal to the master of the house for protection."

"And you shall certainly receive all that he can afford," interposed I. "Nobody can so well understand how truly annoyed you must be at having all your better feelings trifled with in this preposterous fashion."

"Upon my word, that is very complimentary to us," cried the ever-ready Lady Cammy. "I suppose, Mr. Calcrafft, that we

must ask your leave now for expressing our opinion respecting our own cousin. I should like to know what business it is of yours. Perhaps you expect us to make you the subject of our conversation."

I was conscious of having given way overmuch to a not a very justifiable feeling of displeasure, and I now endeavoured to retrieve myself by entering freely into the playful contest offered by my strange visitor.

"No, no, Lady Camilla," replied I. "If the charms of all here are to be remorselessly discussed in their very presence, now that poor Miss Vinny has been released, it is you, unquestionably, who have the prior claim. Pray tell me, Lord Walter, are there any, in her generation, who can pretend to rival the brilliancy of Lady Camilla's complexion?"

"None that I know of, Calcwaft."

"The sparkling lustre of her blue eyes."

"No."

"The enchanting shade of her fair locks."

"That'll do — that'll do!" cried Lady

Camilla, mirthfully hiding with her two hands her unaffected blushes. "That horrid Calcraft is right, after all; is is more unpleasant than I thought, to be too pointedly talked of."

"Nothing but the twuth, nothing but the twuth, though," added Lord Walter. "I suppose one can't be weally in love with a gweat many people at the same time, or I should certainly be despewate upon Cammy, who, after all, is a vewy pwetty girl. Which do you thing the gweatest beauty of the two, Calcwast—Cammy or Vinny?"

"Perhaps you will allow me to reserve my opinion npon that head."

"Whereby you will show your sense and discretion," said Lady Camilla. "We certainly are talking great nonsense, after all, for rational beings, now I come to think of it; I believe we ought to be ashamed of ourselves."

"I weally don't see what better we could talk of," remarked his lordship, in a tone of the sincerest persuasion.

"I dare say you don't, but perhaps Mr.

"Then, come along, Vinny, and play us something lively, there's a good girl."

"I, dear Cammy?"

"Yes, you, of course."

"I can't, dear, just now."

"Why not?"

"Because I do not wish to play before him."

"Before Walter?—nonsense."

"No, not before Walter—before him."

"Before Calcraft—why not, you little goose?"

"Because he abused my playing once, and I never intend to inflict it upon him again."

"My dear Miss Vinny, what can you mean?"

"Oh! I know very well, and you too," replied she, casting upon me a half-mutinous, half-languishing look. "If we were to live a thousand years together, I should never play before you again, after what you said to mamma the first night."

"And a very great deal he must know

about it," chimed in Lady Cammy. "It so happens that you are one of the best performers in London. But it don't matter, I can play while you and Walter dance; so do not let us waste any more time."

Within a very few minutes, Miss Vinny was, according to the approved custom of the age, closely locked in her cousin's embrace, while Lady Camilla, with a volubility which emulated that of her speech, poured forth a whole series of Schotisches, Polkas, and Waltzes. Gracious Heaven! what a strange revolution was here. In the very loneliest sanctuary of my dreary, desolate seclusion, the joyous revelry of music, responded to and outrivalled by the glad harmony of the youthful voices exhaling the mirthfulness of their innocent hearts in youth's own choicest diversion! Enchanted, spell-bound, I gazed and gazed on until I was rudely recalled to the stern realities of the present by a summons from Lady Edward.

I found my cousin's nerves in a sadly

agitated condition, and small indeed was the solace which I was able to afford. At first, she expatiated upon her required departure ; but in terms scarce sufficiently resolute to convince me that such would in her mind be the preferable issue to our present difficulties. I was thus led on into renewing my advice of the previous evening, that no decision whatever should be prematurely taken, and I eventually promised that, within three days, my utmost efforts would be tried to put an end to Lord Walter's intrusion. It was not until this pledge had been distinctly given, that Lady Edward promised me, in her turn, that, during the allotted interval, she would quiescently await the result of my endeavour. I did not so far commit myself without a sincere conviction that I should be thus acting according to the best interests of all concerned ; and yet, great was the relief I experienced on quitting my cousin, when I reflected that, in mere courtesy to my extraordinary visitors, I was entitled to leave them unmolested during

two whole days. Resigning myself, therefore, to the genial influences which they so profusely cast around them, I entered freely into the very spirit of their joyous intercourse as if, in truth, fifteen weary years had been magically removed from the burden of my past existence. The dreaded term did not the less overtake me at last.



## CHAPTER IX.

IMAGINING that I should more easily redeem my pledge, if I dealt with its chief subject alone, I sought an opportunity, on the morning of the third day, for saying a word in private to Lord Walter. I accordingly proposed to him a stroll towards the stables.

When we were beyond the reach of any eaves-dropper, I hesitatingly began, in some such form :

“ My dear Lord Walter, I have to request your kind assistance in a very serious difficulty.”

He stopped, looked full in my face and ex-

claimed, I am bound to admit, with the most cordial effusion :

“ God bless us, and pweserve us, my dear fwiend—with the gweatest possible pleasure. One, two, thwee, in thousands, of course ; only name the sum. Pewhaps I should not go beyond thwee, now that I am about to be mawwied ; but afterwards, you know, we could make it thwee times thwee, if wequisite.”

“ I am more grateful than I can say, my dear Lord Walter,” replied I, “ for your generous proposal, but you have completely misunderstood me. The difficulty I alluded to is by no means pecuniary. What I would wish is that you should enter into my feelings.”

“ What, you in love too, Calcwaft ? ” exclaimed he, “ Take it coolly, now, take it fwigidly, like the dwy champagne—that’s my pwivate advice. Let me see—it’s with Cammy, I suppose—pwetty girl—vewy pwetty girl—but a wum customer, you know. However, a cat may look at a king and, after all, I can tell you a secwet, if you like.”

Having always had a peculiar inclination for hearing a secret, more especially where a fair lady is concerned, I allowed his lordship to proceed as if he had this time lit upon the true subject of my appeal.

“You see,” continued he, “what a wild cweature that Cammy is, though she is as twue and honest as gold; besides which, she and Lady D. can’t manage to cweep on together. Old Dweadnought has therefore no sort of objection to see her mawwied, and, after sundwy hints, has, to my knowledge, within the last thwee months, spoken out pwetty smartly upon the matter. Cammy has pwomised to do her best this vewy year, and though she won’t thwow herself away—and quite wight she—I shouldn’t be the least surprwised if she were to do something vewy extwaordinary in the mawwiage line.”

“Whether my pretentions, had I any, would deserve, or not, to be classed under that head I will not presume to enquire,” interrupted I. “You may rest assured that I have none

whatever, and that the subject to which I would call your attention, is merely that of your present stay at Rockingham Hall."

"My pwesent stay at Wockingham Hall," re-echoed his lordship, with his accustomed nonchalance, but coming at the same time to a dead halt. "My dear fwiend," continued he, "that's business, and Cammy and I are bound to hold no sort of confewence sepatately upon matters of business. If you will but step back as far as the libwawy, we shall find Cammy there, and can pwoceed at once."

"But, my dear Lord Walter, I should so very much prefer ——"

"Impossible, my good fwiend—impossible. I could not honowably listen to a single word."

"Will you, at least, give me credit for the greatest reluctance——"

"When Cammy's there, you can state all about the weluctance, and you will find us most weady to give you a heawing. The stables are all a plant, you know. Come along,

and I will prepare her favourably for the conversation."

On reaching the library, we found Lady Camilla drawing, and Vinny playing to her, on the piano. The moment I entered, the latter brought her performance to an immediate end; but my companion left me no time for any expostulation.

"Cammy, old fellow," cried he, at once, "Calcwaft wants to speak to us upon business; are you tolerably disengaged?"

"Perfectly so."

"That treasure of a Vinny needn't go, need she?"

"Certainly not."

"Then come into court, Calcwaft," continued his lordship, sitting down, "and let us twy and make out what you have to say for yourself."

"It is simply this, my dear Lord Walter—though I would much rather have said it to you alone—I wish to inquire how long I am to be honoured with your company here?"

"How long you are to be honouwed with my company here? Why, as long as you are honouwed with Cammy's. Isn't that it, Cammy?"

"Precisely—very good indeed."

"Well, but you must allow me to explain myself clearly. In ordinary circumstances, I really should be too happy to have the pleasure of receiving you and her and so many of your friends as the house could hold. But situated as I at present am, I cannot afford myself this gratification without seriously interfering with the comfort of others."

"He don't expwess himself so very badly—does he, Cammy?"

"By no means."

"You must make every allowance," proceeded I, unable to suppress a passing smile at the imperturbable assurance of my guests—"you must make every allowance for the extreme unwillingness with which I enter upon the subject at all; nor could I have gone even so far were it not for the hope that, at some future day, you will make me ample amends."

"You know, Calcwaft," here observed Lord Walter, "that the future is vewy pwecarious and uncertain. There is no time like the pwesent for fwiends to meet—is there Cammy?"

"None whatsoever."

"And so we had better pwofit by these hours of wecweation from the toils and sowwows of life which Pwvidence imparts to us, and enjoy them ungwudgingly to our utmost."

"Nothing would be more agreeable to my feelings, I can assure you, Lord Walter; but, unfortunately, the present state of things cannot last. If you remain on, others must go."

"That is pwecisely what we wish," exclaimed his lordship—"isn't it, Cammy?"

"Absolutely."

"Ah! but, my dear young friends, it cannot be what I wish; and you really must have the kindness and discretion to consult the feelings of others, as well as your own."

"But we do—don't we, Walter?"

"We do, indeed, Cammy. It is solely out

of wegard to the feelings of others that we are here. It it a matter of chawity, and of considewation for poor Vinny. We can go, you know, Calcwaft, this vewy day, this vewy morning, that is provided, of course, you we-lease Vinny."

"Exactly—the very thing," chimed in Lady Cammy.

"But I am not detaining Miss Vinny, God forbid that I should !" replied I. "Her mother is on a visit to me ; she, of course, accompanies her mother ; and there is for me but one plain, indisputable duty,—to make my house as agreeable—or, at least, as bearable—to my cousins as possible."

"But, my good friend, we are only endeavouring to assist you in cawwyng out this most natuwal wish on your part."

"And we flatter ourselves," added Lady Cammy, "that we are tolerably successful."

"Come, you need not look so pwovoked and distwacted, old man," resumed her cousin. "The wemedy is entirely in your own hands, isn't it, Cammy?"



"Entirely."

"Would that it were!" exclaimed I, fervently.

"But it weally and twuly is, Calcwaft. You certainly are wather in a fix; but you have thwee distinct ways out of it, hasn't he, Cammy?"

"Three, has he, Walter? I don't quite see the three?"

"Thwee, Cammy, and not one less. In the first place, he can wecommend Lady E. to weturn to London."

"Of course he can—that's one."

"Or else he can pwevail upon her to let Vinny weturn there with us."

"Exactly; that's two."

"Well, and as to the third, Cammy, he can bwreak up his establishment here and go abroad."

"Oh! of course, Walter, to be sure."

"Now you see, my dear Calcwaft," resumed Lord Walter, "we shall be too happy to assist you in your pwesent pwedicament; but the

fact is, that it wests with you and not with us to choose one of these thwee simple, stwaight-forward ways out of it."

"Very well put indeed," cried Lady Cammy. "And now, Mr. Calcraft, you are in full possession of our views of the case."

"Which makes it the more incumbent upon me to state mine," replied I. "Lady Camilla, I trust that you will honour me with your company so long as Lady Edward Dieaway and her daughter do so themselves. And, as to you, Lord Walter, that you will favour me with your's until Friday next. Now I am sure that we understand each other."

"I am afwaid not, Calcwaft," was his lordship's reply. "I shall be most happy to stay with you until Fwiday—but if Cammy does not go on Fwiday, and it is not vewy pwo-bable that she will—as I am in charge of her, and must not lose sight of her, I must beg leave to twespass on your hospitality still further."

As this strange conversation was proceeding,

I had felt a still increasing misgiving that, under the stimulus of their mutual presence, the young allies would offer a more obstinate resistance than if I dealt with them, or at least with one of them, separately. I, therefore, thought it advisable to bring our present interview to a close, which I did by expressing my persuasion, as I retired, that between then and the appointed Friday, Lord Walter would recognize the propriety of yielding to Lady Edward's wishes and my own.

I had not been long in my study, ruminating upon the apparent failure of my honest endeavour to further my cousin's views, when I heard a gentle rap at the door which was at the same time slightly opened.

"Mr. Calcraft," said Lady Camilla, whose blushing cheeks and sparkling eyes were tolerably manifest. "I hope that you are pretty well. May I come in for a moment?"

"Certainly—by all means."

"No—don't disturb yourself. It is only a word I wish to say to you. We can leave the

door open as there is nobody within hearing. You are not angry with us, I hope?"

A gleam of heart-felt and almost tender anxiety shot across the fair speaker's mischievous glance, as she uttered these last words, and I felt myself bound at once to answer her inquiry by another.

"My dear Lady Camilla, I trust that I did not appear so!"

"Not in the least," responded she. "But Walter, you know, is so ridiculous, and I do feel so inclined for a little bit of fun with you when he is there, that I am afraid sometimes, upon reflection, that we are carrying it too far. We would not hurt your feelings for all the world—you are quite sure of that, aren't you?"

"Perfectly convinced, my dear Lady Camilla."

"That's all right—then mind me. You know what our object is?"

"I do."

"And you see that we are determined to

carry it out, if we can—at all events, that we will try ?”

“I have, indeed, gathered so much from your conversation.”

“Now, shall I tell you what you are driving at ?”

“Pray do.”

“You are doing your utmost—your very utmost to, in short—to bring upon us something awful.”

I started back as, this bold confirmation of a latent misgiving of my own being thus imparted to me, I more clearly discerned the gaunt image of an elopement.

“I ought to blush, I know ; and I hope that I am blushing at speaking in this manner to you. But this is a very serious matter, you see, particularly for me.”

“Particularly for you, Lady Camilla ?”

“For others too, of course ; but it is very serious for me, also. Somehow or another, I am pretty well mixed up with it ; and, if it takes a bad turn, I shall get a fair share of the blame—shall I not now ?”

“Unquestionably ; but through whose fault, may I make so bold as to ask ?”

“Through mine partly, I dare say ; but through that of circumstances also.”

“Indeed ?”

“Yes, indeed ; how provoking you are ! I am not quite a free agent in the matter. I must interfere, whether I wish it or not, in one way or another.”

“Must you ?”

“Must I ? of course I must. Look here : I suppose that I know about as much of Walter and of Vinny as you do—don’t I ?”

“Well, I suppose you do.”

“And I am about as much bound as you are to take some interest in their affairs, particularly when they choose to make me their confidant and adviser.”

“You are certainly as much called upon to interfere as I can be.”

“Well, then, you find it very easy to steer clear of the whole business—don’t you ?”

There was no denying the force of this appeal.

"I have you there, Mr. Calcraft, a little bit—haven't I now?" proceeded my fair visitor. "You were very anxious, I make no doubt, to have no share in the matter, to keep well with all parties, and so forth. But where are you now?"

"Where am I now, Lady Camilla? Where, but in my own house, and endeavouring to do the honours of it according to my humble notions of propriety and kindness towards others."

"Oh! I dare say. You are not at all siding with one party against the other, furthering her views and counteracting ours?"

"Not at all more, my dear Lady Camilla, than I feel myself in duty bound with respect to Lady Edward's most legitimate apprehensions and objections."

"Ah! that's exactly it. You think Lady E. right, and you give her your full support. I think Vinny right and I am giving her mine. What's the difference between us?"

“Simply that I am discouraging, and that you are promoting, a most imprudent act.”

“The matter is not so easily disposed of as all that, I can tell you. It stands to reason that, if I am right, I am right, and if I am wrong, I am wrong, and it does not require any very immensely clever head to make that out. I should even go so far as to say that it is the same with you. The question to determine is, which of the two is in the right. Upon this head, you know my views—I know yours; and there is no use our discussing them any more at present. What I wish to impress upon you just now, is this—that matters have gone so far as to render great caution and prudence necessary. Happily, Walter is by nature indolent and unenterprising: but, in his quiet, careless way, he would be as reckless of consequences as most people. You remember what I alluded to when I came in to you just now?”

“Perfectly well.”

“If too many obstacles are raised—if too



much resistance is openly made—some such occurrence is not quite impossible.”

“And what would you say, then, Lady Camilla?”

“What I would say, then—are you speaking seriously?” cried she, as the fiery pride of the Darealls kindled for a moment her searching glance. “Have I given you any right, Sir Charles Rockingham, to put such a question as that to me?”

“Certainly not, my dear Lady Camilla, if it can give you the least offence.”

“How could it but offend, considering the charming compliment which it involved. We were alluding to an act that would disgrace the very best friend I have in the world, and, in your quiet, sleepy tone, you ask me what I should think of it.”

“My dear Lady Camilla,” replied I, “if I have spoken incautiously or injudiciously, and I am sure that I have since you say so, I here entreat your forgiveness. I have an evil habit of seeking rather to ascertain the whole

opinion of others than to hazard my own, particularly with strangers. I have doubtlessly given way to this propensity overmuch in the present case."

"You have, indeed."

"However, deeming as you do, I suppose, that the happiness of two of your best friends depends on a certain contingency, was it not just possible that you might be less anxious about the means, than about the end? At all events, was it not, to a certain extent, excusable that I should seek to ascertain, whether your views entirely coincided with my own respecting an act, which many people in society are apt to consider with far more indulgence than it deserves—"

"That will do—that will do," interrupted Lady Camilla. "If I was angry, it is all over now, and I am sure that you never meant any deliberate offence. Still, it is as well that you should know, once for all, that we Darealls, whatever may be our manners and bearing, are not apt to be lax in questions of honesty."

or honour    Now for the matter in hand. I should consider any such act as we were talking of on the part of Vinny, as an incalculable misfortune, and that is why I am so over-cautious, perhaps, respecting anything which might tend to render it barely possible."

"With these views, Lady Camilla—and I can assure you that I never doubted that they were yours—I cannot but hope that you will have influence enough to prevent any such folly from being contemplated."

"Mind you, Sir Charles," replied she, with more seriousness than was her wont, "my influence has never been fairly tested yet. When I observed the affections to be really engaged on both sides, I considered the matter over more anxiously than you may think, and, having come to the conclusion that, upon the whole, it would do very well, I spoke and acted accordingly. Now, it stands to reason that, agreeing as I did with the parties concerned, I was more readily listened to than if I had had any opposition to offer.

Do my best, however, I certainly will, to try and keep them within bounds ; and perhaps, I am more cautious than you imagine. I daresay, for instance, that you suppose that it is I who brought Walter here ?”

“Appearances certainly point somewhat to such a conclusion.”

“Well, they are wrong there, and you too. It was not until I felt convinced that, somehow or another, Walter could find his way here, that I seemingly took the lead, for the purpose of keeping all things straight. But you must help me a little, you know, and not go dashing about like a bull in a china shop.”

“Let me see, Lady Camilla,” observed I ; “you expect me to countenance a thing I highly disapprove of, for fear that something else still more unfortunate might occur. I would much rather remain entirely unconnected with the whole transaction.”

“But that is exactly what we require. I beg your pardon, my dear Mr. Calcraft, but you really are not giving free scope to your

powers of comprehension. Say nothing—do nothing, one way or another—that is what we ask, and, happen what will, no responsibility can rest upon you.”

“What, seriously, my dear Lady Camilla? If I receive and entertain Lord Walter in my house, under present circumstances, and against Lady Edward’s special desire, I am in no wise implicated in the possible consequences? I wish that I could think so.”

“Look at both sides, please,” exclaimed my ready opponent, “You have not invited him and you can only obtain his departure by incurring still greater risk, entirely on your own account. So long as matters run on smoothly here, we have ample time for reflection, and so forth. If you bring about a crisis, you may conjure up the most awful extremities. Now, that’s enough for to-day—think it over well, and I am sure that you will see that my advice is none so bad.”

She was leaving me, but I followed her to the door.

“I hope, at least, that I am forgiven, Lady Camilla?”

“Forgiven! what for? Oh! about the running away. I should think so. I am very peppery, but I bear no malice. Here, shake hands—and, now, I wish you a very good morning.”

I did not fail to give Lady Camilla’s opinion the very fullest consideration, and the conclusion I came to was as follows, whether right or wrong:—To redeem my pledge to my cousin by using every effort of persuasion to induce Lord Walter’s departure; and, failing these, to avoid, as far as lay in my power, any further interference in the question.

Lady Edward, perhaps more sanguine than I could feel myself as to the success of my endeavours, and, at all events, adhering to her original determination, confined herself strictly to her room. We were thus relieved from any of the petty conflicts which might have occurred had she been thrown into communication with the unwelcome invaders. As to

myself, I experienced no difficulty in yielding to the genial influences around me, and certainly nothing could be more truly joyous and convivial than my intercourse with my youthful guests, until the appointed Friday overtook us. I had marked out, for my renewed attempt on that inauspicious morning, the hour which immediately followed that of our breakfast, and, in my perplexity, I saw no better means of introducing the disagreeable topic than by asking Lord Walter at what time he meant to leave us.

“To leave you, my good friend?” said he, with the utmost unconcern. “We are not dweaming of leaving you—are we, Cammy?”

“Not that I know of.”

“But, my dear Lord Walter,” proceeded I, “you remember what I have ventured to request and to—expect.”

“You must settle all that with Cammy, Calcwaft. Cammy and I are inseparable.”

“Am I then to understand,” said I, appealing to both, “that my wishes on this point will not be regarded?”

“Pwecisely.”

“Exactly.”

“We would not for the world bweak up so  
ngweeable a party—would we, Cammy?”

“Not for ten worlds.”

“But it will be broken up all the more,”  
observed I; “for if Lord Walter remains,  
Lady Edward will certainly insist upon going.”

“Where to?” inquired Lady Cammy.

“In what diwection?” asked her cousin.

“I cannot exactly say. To London, I  
believe.”

“Hurrah!” cries Lady Cammy.

“Huwwah!” re-echoes her cousin.

“Hurrah!” even adds Miss Vinny, in an  
under-tone, and, withal, timidly glancing at  
me.

“Very well—very well,” responded I.  
“Nothing will give me greater pleasure than  
to see this unfortunate business concluded to  
the satisfaction of you all. I have now done  
my best, I trust, to make you aware, Lord  
Walter, how much I wish that you should



bring the visit with which you have honoured me to a close."

"My good fwiend, you have cawwied your fwankness on this head to the vewy limits of wudeness—hasn't he, Cammy?"

"Unless he sent for the police, I don't see what more he could do."

"And even the police, you know, Cammy, wouldn't pwoceed without a pwoper wawwant."

"No, I suppose not," rejoined Lady Cammy. "And so, Mr. Calcraft, as there is nothing more that you can say or do, I should recommend you to dismiss all further care upon the subject—"

"To withdwaw from the stage—"

"And to enjoy what recreation life may yet afford."

"Vewy, vewy good."

After I had signified my assent to this wholesome advice, a moment's silence ensued; but such was never of very long duration in the company then assembled, and it was soon broken by Lord Walter.

"Cammy."

"Well."

"Shall you be vewy sowwy to see London again?"

"I shall try and bear up against my despair."

"The Opewa, eh, Cammy?"

"Ay."

"And the balls."

"Just so."

"And you, Vinny, will you be able to stwuggle thwough existence there duwing the next thwee months?"

"I hope so, Walter, and yet, I shall be quite sorry to go too."

"So shall I."

"So shall I."

"After all," resumed his Lordship, "Cal-cwaft is a vewy good fellow—has behaved like a thowough bwick in his difficulties, and has established an enduwing claim to our we-gard and fwiership."

"That he truly has," said Lady Cammy, authoritatively.

"That he really has," re-echoed Vinny languishingly.

I was responding, with a becoming obeisance, when Lady Camilla suddenly exclaimed :

"I say, if Lady E. don't go, eh, Walter?"

"If she bweaks down in the packing?"

"Which I rather suspect she will," timidly observed Lavinia.

"Well, then, Cammy," resumed Lord Walter, "will you cwy?"

"No."

"And will you cwy, Vinny?"

"No."

"All wight; nor I neither; nor Calcwaft, neither, I hope; and so we will twy and get on here as mewwily as we can, while Pwvidence thinks fit that our stay should be pwolonged. Indeed, we have no gwounds for complaining of Calcwaft; and I am gwowing quite weconciled to the old shop."

"So am I."

"So am I."

I could not but reply how heartily I wished that I could offer a worthier reception.

“Not at all, my good friend—not at all; we are thoroughly satisfied.”

With this gratifying assurance, our conversation was brought to a close.

So soon as I could see Lady Edward, I imparted to her my conviction, that her nephew would not be brought to meet our wishes by any means that I could devise. Great was the distress which I most unwillingly gave rise to, and most strenuous appeared the distracted mother's consequent determination of bringing her visit to an immediate end. Notwithstanding all I could urge about the corresponding perils of the London season, the packing was commenced with great energy by the hurried attendants; but, as Miss Vinny had well foreseen, the trial was too much for the invalid's nervous system. Towards evening, a sharp fit of hysterics came on; the neighbouring doctor was called in; perfect repose of body and mind was his foremost prescription—and thus was our expected breaking-up again indefinitely averted.

## CHAPTER X.

HAPPY and joyous, indeed, were the days which ensued—happier and more joyous by far than I had deemed it possible for the old hall again to witness in my time. Whatever disappointment my young visitors may have experienced at the postponement of their return to London, was either courteously concealed or dispelled by the enjoyment of their mutual society. From morning until night, the long-silent, the long-deserted house resounded with the glad music of their youthful voices, and seemed itself to gather life from the outpourings of their teeming spirits. But not the house only. The weather—so essential an ingredient, if not of our

happiness, at least of our enjoyment, and which had so relentlessly frowned upon my earlier hospitalities—was now vouchsafing its serenest smiles. Spring had come upon us in earnest. Every tree, every shrub, every plant was clothing itself with the glowing promise of the year, and the beaming sunshine of May was casting its purest halo over the blooming revival of nature. The farm itself, which had shown so forbidding an aspect to Miss Dieaway during our first drive was now all alive with the young offspring of the fold—the stall and the poultry-yard. With so much to witness of what is always attractive, and was, besides, somewhat novel to each of them, the house could not long confine my companions ; nor was I myself the last to leave it or the first to return. But I was seldom alone, whether within doors or without, and either one or other of my guests—if not all three—would soon press upon my footsteps or break in upon my attempted retirement. On the whole—and for very good cause—Lady Camilla

Dareall was my most constant associate ; and now that the first astonishment which the peculiarities of her manner had excited in me had yielded to the influence of acquaintance, I could not but be charmed by her unfailing good humour, her ready wit, and her remarkable aptitude for promoting every species of diversion. I am free to admit, also, that there was something attaching, as well as amusing, in the extraordinary but genial assurance of Lord Walter. And, as to Miss Vinny, if I had recognized her beauty and her charm when both were shrouded in the veil of her youthful sadness, how could I wholly escape their influence now that she was actually transfigured by present happiness and the still more blissful anticipations of responsive affection. To be sure, the state of Lady Edward was the one cloud cast upon all this sunshine ; but, since she had worked herself into a real indisposition, her mind seemed infinitely less harassed, and it was now in my power to afford, even in that quarter, not a little comfort and consolation.

I have said that, at this period, I was happier than I had ever hoped again to be. Indeed, it seemed to me as if the book of my life, which I had perhaps prematurely closed upon its earlier pages, was re-opening far behind the mark, and that many a by-gone leaf was transferred once more from the account of memory to that of hope. But alas! with these youthful aspirations, the visions also of youth too freely recurred, and these were doomed to an early and not very gratifying issue. They were rudely dispelled in some such wise as follows.

We had spent one fine afternoon, either together, or alternately together, in the flower garden, watching the full bloom of the tulip beds, and the progress of their forthcoming rivals, when we were most suddenly overtaken by a very heavy shower. Each party sought the shelter nearest at hand; Lord Walter and Lavinia in the green house; Lady Camilla and I in a neighbouring summer-house. We had continued to converse on together upon the most



indifferent subjects, when my free-spoken companion, as if observing that the opportunity was a favourable one for something more confidential, abruptly exclaimed :

“ You seem to like Walter a little better now you know more of him.”

“ He certainly is very amusing.”

“ That is rather a questionable compliment, particularly in the way you say it. But isn't he also good-natured ? ”

“ Yes.”

“ Very easy to get on with ? ”

“ Certainly.”

“ And remarkably good-looking ? ”

“ Remarkably.”

“ All this granted,” continued Lady Camilla, “ I wonder if——, but no ; never mind. Perhaps it is wiser to say nothing about it.”

“ Pray proceed, my dear Lady Camilla,” observed I. “ You know that if we are not allies, unfortunately, we are at least very confidential adversaries. Pray let me know what you were going to ask.”

"You really wish it."

"I really do."

"Well, I am anxious to know whether, seeing as you do, Vinny and Walter so much together, how devoted they are to each other and how well, in many respects, they appear suited, you do not begin to think that it would be a great big burning shame forcibly to part them?"

"Of course, you wish me to answer you quite sincerely, quite frankly?"

"Certainly."

"Then I will freely admit, that the longer the present state of thing lasts, the more painful, I undoubtedly think, such a separation would be. And yet, I would esteem that momentary suffering far preferable to the enduring misery which must result from an ill-assorted union."

"And so you will not allow that those advantages and good qualities of Walter which you do not deny, may, upon the whole, tend to secure to Vinny as fair a share of happiness as

any of us here have a right to expect?"

"Indeed, Lady Camilla, I cannot go so far; but, after all, I am not a very competent judge."

"Oh! you are competent enough, I dare say, but I am not sure that you are quite—quite —"

"Quite what, Lady Camilla?"

"Shall I really speak out?"

"Pray do."

"Well, then, quite impartial in the matter."

"You wrong me a little there, I hope. I can assure you that, far from having any unfavourable opinion of Lord Walter, I should like him very much as a guest—as an acquaintance—as a companion—in short, in almost any or every capacity, saving that of Miss Dieaway's husband."

"Ah! exactly—that is just it, and very much confirms my previous impression."

"How so, Lady Camilla?"

"What I meant to say—and I may as well come out with it at once—is, that you may not be quite impartial in the question of Vinny's marriage."

"Indeed!—why should I be otherwise?"

"Why? come, come—you don't want me for that. Could not there be some motive, very imaginable, and perhaps very excusable? You understand me now, don't you?"

"Less than ever, I assure you."

"But you wish to understand me?"

"Very much indeed."

"And you won't be savage with me if I make myself quite clear?"

"I trust not."

"Then, look here. It is none so easy to say after all," continued she, with one of her hysterical little laughs. "If you had—if you happened to have any particular feeling for Vinny yourself, you would scarcely be a fair and impartial judge of the merits and claims of others. Dear me! how pale you have grown all of a sudden—this is only a supposition of mine, you know."

"Of course — how could it be otherwise than a supposition."

"Oh! as to that, Vinny is quite pretty

enough to set half the world wild, and the sedatest and solemnest people have hearts like others. Besides, I have made sundry little remarks of my own."

"Indeed? And to what do they tend, Lady Camilla?"

"Well, they might tend to show that Vinny is not quite indifferent to somebody not a hundred miles off. Something in the look when she approaches—in the manner of speaking to her."

"Perhaps you might observe the same on his part, Lady Camilla, with respect to others here, were you a spectator in their case also."

"No—no; that won't do at all," replied she, not without a slight blush. "I have other grounds besides. Shall I state them, too?"

"By all means."

"Is not it rather strange that Lady E., who was so frantic at first at the notion of our remaining on here together, should be now so remarkably quiescent? Have you not observed the change?"

"I certainly have."

"And how do you account for it?"

"Simply by the fact of her having real indisposition to withdraw her thoughts from prospective suffering."

Lady Camilla here shook her sapient head several times as she looked full in my face and said:

"Ah! we account for it otherwise."

"Who are we—may I ask?"

"We? I and other people, I suppose; but never mind who. Perhaps it is my maid."

"And to what do you attribute my cousin's apparent resignation? Will you tell me that, at least?"

"I don't know what to say. It is delicate enough; but as I have gone so far, perhaps I may as well proceed. I cannot but imagine then that Lady E. may see some way out of her difficulties here which may not be so available elsewhere. Come, you understand me—don't you?"

"Not in the least."

"Oh, my gracious! what work it is with men, to be sure. If it wasn't raining so hard, I would run away and leave it to your own common sense to make it out."

"That would be the very cruelest thing, Lady Camilla, that you could possibly do."

"Much more than going straight on to the end of the chapter?"

"Very much more."

"Well, it is your wish again, you know. Suppose,—it is only supposition, mind you—that a mother who had some knowledge of the world were in Lady E.'s present position, and wished to get out of it; how do you think that she would get out of it?"

"I have not the slightest conception."

"Oh, dear me! dear me! Don't you think it probable that, wishing to discard an unwelcome suitor of her daughter, she would try and find a substitute for him?"

"A substitute?"

"A substitute, yes. Don't you know what that means? I am sorry that we have not a

dictionary here. Don't you think it likely, then, that instead of saying simply and absolutely to her daughter: 'Arethusa, you must not dream of marrying Fitz-Avondale,' she would proceed in some such wise. She would look out among her acquaintances, perhaps among her connections, for some steady, respectable, sensible man, with a house, home, plenty of money, and so forth,—by hook or by crook bring Arethusa and him together,—point him out to her as the very beyondest of all the beyonds, and thus attempt a formidable diversion? You look very grave, Mr. Calcraft."

"It is only my attention, Lady Camilla."

"And I am still to go on—am I?"

"Pray do."

"Such then being Arethusa's mother's very natural part, what do you think should be that of Arethusa herself, and of Arethusa's allies?"

"I would much rather hear it from you, Lady Camilla, than attempt to imagine it myself."



"With all my heart," answered she; "but I do trust that I have not given you any offence. You know that Vinny's affections are engaged; and if they are so truly, as I fully believe they are, Antinous himself would have no chance with her."

"I have little enough in common with Antinous, I very well know, Lady Camilla, and, at my time of life, might very well be acquitted of such folly as you impute to me."

"At your time of life, I like that. You are not yet thirty-five, are you?"

"Not very far from it."

"Why, you are a mere school-boy: you haven't got a single grey-hair yet. I was looking pretty closely the other day and I couldn't make out one."

"I am sorry that you had no fitter employment, Lady Camilla."

"Ah! just so. But, really and truly, I should be in despair if you had misunderstood me. All I meant to say was, that matters have gone so far between Vinny and Walter,

that it is too late now for any one to step in."

"Yes, but as no one, to my knowledge, is dreaming of stepping in, I cannot but think, Lady Camilla, the warning rather superfluous."

"Dear me! dear me! I am sorry that I spoke at all, now; and yet, I thought myself quite safe. As I foolishly imagined, there must have been either a little truth in our suspicions, and then a word would have been just in time; or no truth at all, and then no sort of offence could have been given or taken."

"But who, in the name of Heaven, has given or has taken offence?" was I exclaiming, when the sound of fast-approaching footsteps put an end to our strange dialogue.

"I say, Calcwaft, Calcwaft," cried Lord Walter, breaking in upon us, "the wain is over now, and you mustn't be wetiwing this way into solitawy corners with Cammy. I never saw such a despewate fellow as Calcwaft

for holding pwivate conversations with young ladies, did you, Vinny?"

"We have no great right to speak on that head ourselves just now, Walter," was the languishing reply.

I felt, no matter how or what, and I suppose that I must have looked somewhat as I felt, for his lordship exclaimed—

"I say, Cammy, you two havn't been quawwelling, have you? It don't seem quite sewene. Calcwaft's eye is all fiewy, and you are as wed as a gewanium yourself."

"Oh my gwacious! how extwemely acute we are this morning," responded my ready-witted companion, imitating her interrogator's peculiar pronunciation. "Calcraft and I having had to run for it, when the rain began, and been boxed up here ever since, may be allowed to be a little flushed, I suppose. Now, what do you say to a move towards the house, before the next shower comes on; and as you have had flirting enough for this afternoon, Miss Vinny, just you come along with me."

And onwards the two allies proceeded accordingly, Lady Camilla, as I thought fit to conjecture, imparting to her companion the result of our hopeful conversation.

I did my best, on our way home, to dispel from Lord Walter's mind any such impression as he had lately conveyed, but at heart I felt saddened and annoyed. The more I reflected upon what had fallen from Lady Camilla, the more strange and unwarrantable did it appear to me. But yet, I could not wholly account for the secret disquietude which it had created within me, nor for the irritation which it had awakened, with respect to others, far more than towards the unguarded speaker herself. It was clear—or so I deemed it—that Lady Camilla had not spoken on her own account alone. Who were the other parties concerned? Had Lord Walter originated or seconded the notion? Had Miss Vinny been pleased to attribute herself this fresh triumph to her charms? If my own secret feelings were to afford any clue to the solitary workings of my

curiosity, Miss Dieaway was no stranger to the matter. Angry as I was with all three, it was upon her that my undefined resentment chiefly centred ; and, if I had received from her some open and unprovoked affront, I could scarcely have been more moved against her. Alas ! for my dull, lifeless, but untroubled retirement !

Such being my mood, attended withal by no very great disposition to conceal it, my quick-sighted guests were at no great pains to detect it. Many were their efforts to dispel the gloom which hung over me, both at dinner and during the evening. But, for the first time since our acquaintance had begun, their playful attacks failed to produce the intended effect and, as frequently occurs in similar cases, the more conscious I grew of my discourtesy, the less I was inclined to atone for it.

“ Shall not we be able to wouse up Calcwaft this evening, Cammy ? ” exclaimed Lord Walter, at length, during the critical interval between dinner and tea. “ He is quite off his food, and dweadfully westive.”

"You know that he has a very bad headache, poor man; he told us so at dinner," replied Lady Camilla, who herself had been more thoughtful and less agreeable than was her wont.

"I wonder what is the best thing for a headache?" said Vinny, feelingly.

"You had better ask him," answered her friend.

"Is there nothing that I could do to relieve your poor head?" softly enquired Miss Dieaway, addressing me in compliance with this advice.

"Nothing at all, I am very much obliged to you."

"Won't you have a game of billiards with me?"

"No, thank you."

"Nor a game of draughts?"

"I am very much obliged to you; but really I am unequal to any exertion to-night, and unfit for any society."

"Well, but the more you mope the worse you will be," chimed in Lady Cammy.

"Would you like a little music? Shall we sing you a song or play you a waltz?"

"Who is we, Lady Camilla, may I ask?"

"Why Vinny and I, to be sure."

"Do you think that Miss Dieaway would play for my pleasure?"

"I don't know what to say—you had better ask her. What do you think, Vinny? Will you play to him this evening, as he is not well?"

"Perhaps I would if I thought it would give him any pleasure; but I know very well that it would not. You will see that he won't ask me."

She was right, for I certainly remained silent.

"Then there is nothing that we could do to comfort and cheer you?" continued the still subdued Lady Camilla.

"Nothing whatever, my dear friends, saving to excuse my present unsociable mood. You know that I have been so long unaccustomed to society, that I have almost unfitted myself for it."

“The fact is,” said Lord Walter, listlessly, “that our woom is more wequired than our company, though Calcwaft is much too well-bwed to tell us so. What say you, Cammy, to a wetweat towards the billiards?”

“All right,” was the merry reply, and the three associates disappeared accordingly together.

I had been annoyed and disquieted by their presence and its tokens ; I had sincerely and very ostensibly wished myself to be alone again. But now that they were gone, now that the glad halo which they bore around them and about them had sunk into lonely darkness, I felt wearier and more oppressed than before. The more I brooded over my unwonted mood, the less was I satisfied that its motive or its pretext was sufficient ; but, on that very account, I was the more angry with myself for having been angry upon such shadowy grounds. To recal my irritated and wandering thoughts, I took up, first a newspaper, and then a book ; but both equally



failed to fix my attention. In fact, my truant spirit was away, if not far away. In the neighbouring billiard-room, amid the joyous laughter and the youthful discourse which would faintly, but ceaselessly, break upon my ear, there was I in mind and in heart. Suddenly, the livelier sounds subsided into the low murmur of some whispered conspiracy : a moment of utter silence ensued, and the slight rustling of a muslin gown behind me warned me that a stealthy step was drawing near.

“Lady Camilla!” exclaimed I, taking possession of a slight hand, which was playfully interposed between my eyes and my book.

“You are wong there, Mr. Calcwaft : don’t you know my wing?”

It was, indeed, Lord Walter’s ring, barely adhering to the taper little finger ; and it was also an attempted imitation of his idiom, but it certainly was not he.

“Are you better now?” inquired Miss Dieaway.

“Is he wecovewing from this most dis-

twessing indisposition, Vinny?" exclaimed his real lordship, from the doorway.

"I think he really is," replied Lavinia, after having attentively studied my countenance; "but he will be better still presently, I hope, when I have said a few words to him alone."

"All wight, all wight," responded his lordship; "Cammy and I can finish our game while you and he are compawing notes."

"Is the head really a little better?" resumed Miss Vinny, anxiously.

"Yes, it is, I think."

"And the—what shall I say?—the feelings?"

"The feelings?"

"Yes, the feelings. You know very well what I mean. Are you still angry with us?"

"With whom, Miss Dieaway?"

"I am not Miss Dieaway; I am Vinny—your little fairy of former days."

"Very well;—but with whom am I angry?"

"Ah, indeed! that is just what I wish to know"

It was evident from her tremulous tone that my interrogator's courage was scarcely equal to the undertaking, which she had, more or less voluntarily, entered upon. She proceeded, however, with what assurance she could best command.

"You were a little out of spirits with us all just now, weren't you?"

"Was I?"

"And particularly with me?"

"Why particularly with you?"

"Why, indeed! I am sure that I can have done nothing to annoy you."

"When did I say that you had?"

"You did not say anything about it, but your manner so clearly showed that you were offended or distressed about something! Now, you know, we may be very foolish, silly people, and I suppose we are: but you may be sure, for the whole wide world, that we would not give you a moment's uneasiness—you who have been so very, very kind to us. Now, I do wonder very much—but never mind."

"Pray go on."

"Well, then, I should very much like to know what that silly Cammy really said to you?"

"You had better ask her."

"I have already."

"Will she not tell you?"

"Oh! yes, to be sure; but still—"

"Still!"

"I should wish so much to hear your version of it also, more particularly something—"

"What may that be?"

The fair speaker blushed deeply—seemed more perplexed and embarrassed than ever—but finally muttered:

"How far my name was used?"

"By me, not at all that I am aware of."

"No, not by you, but by Cammy."

"Surely, you would learn that more accurately from her."

"No; but really I wish to know your view, your impression. So do tell me them, pray."

I am attempting to recal the gentle interro-

gator's words; but how could I retrace the anxious expression of that half-veiled, suppliant eye, the tremulous eagerness which seemed to pervade the slender form itself.

"You wish to know my impression, Miss Vinny, respecting what occurred this afternoon? You really urge me to state it?"

"I do, most earnestly."

"Well, my impression is that a most needless and uncalled for warning was given——, on whose part I need not specify."

If at any time I had indulged in the slightest feeling for revenge or retaliation, it would have been amply gratified by the expression of anguish which, for a moment, shot across Miss Dieaway's ingenuous countenance. She soon replied, however, with more self-possession than I could have given her credit for:

"You have not quite understood what I requested. When I wished to know your impression of what Cammy had said, I did not mean what you—— I don't know exactly how to express myself."

"Let me try and assist you. You wish me to tell you, not so much what I thought respecting what Lady Camilla said, as what I thought she had said."

"Precisely."

"To speak still more by the book, perhaps it was not so much the impression which I may have formed, as the impression which I had received, that you were anxious to learn. Well, assuming it to be so, I think that I have already answered both views of the question when I said that I understood Lady Camilla to convey to me a warning, and that I considered that warning to be needless and uncalled for."

"And did that warning proceed from me?"

"That you can best determine yourself, Miss Vinny."

"All I can say, is," exclaimed she, "that if you thought an unkind message was sent to you, it was still more unkind of you to think it came from me."

Her tears were now dropping fast, pearl upon pearl. Could I witness the sight unmoved, and think that I, even I, was the cause? In a moment more I was standing at her side, enclosing within mine her slender hand, and no envious eye was upon us.

“Lavinia,” said I, “sorry am I, in truth, that I have lived to see any tear of yours falling on my account. Remember that I have sought no interview, no explanation with you. It is you who have urged me, who have pressed me to speak, and how could I answer your repeated questions, saving with the honest, homely truth?”

“But why,” murmured she, “did you suppose the message to come particularly from me?”

“Simply because it related so directly to you, that I could not conceive that it should be conveyed, without, at least, some sanction of yours.”

“Well, this is exactly what occurred: I am quite at liberty to mention it, if you would like to hear it.”

“I should very much, indeed.”

“It certainly was I who first observed and mentioned that mamma was growing wonderfully reconciled to her stay here ; but I drew no particular conclusions from it. It was Cammy and Walter, and more especially that silly Cammy, who would have it that mamma must have some motive of her own for this unexpected resignation of hers. From first to last, I laughed at the notion—”

What could my traitorous countenance again have betrayed here—and why did the fair speaker pause to raise that anxious, sorrowing look ?

“I will not be misunderstood,” resumed she, overcoming her agitation with a convulsive effort ; “ what I laughed at was the notion that you could possibly feel —— in short, anything more than the commonest interest for me. But that mamma should have wished it otherwise, was so natural that I could not deny its being probable. That is my whole share in the wretched matter. All the rest is



Cammy's doing, and she will tell you so herself ; not that she ever meant anything like a warning, but merely to find out if there were any truth in her suspicions."

"And will you tell me to what conclusion she has come?"

"Certainly not ; you must ask that yourself. I have said quite enough—perhaps, a great deal too much. At all events, far more than I ever could have dreamed of uttering, if—if ——"

She paused again, quite overcome.

"Won't you go on?" said I.

"I will try," resumed she. "What was I saying?"

"That you never would have gone so far, if ——"

"Well—if I had not seen that you were angry with me—with us all—and if I had not been assured that I alone could set everything right again. To think that you, who have been so kind to us all, and particularly to me ——"

"Come, don't cry again, my dear Vinny,"

said I, "or I really shall be angry with you, which, believe me, I have never yet been or thought of being for an instant. There may have been a slight, a very slight misunderstanding between us, but it is cleared up now—completely cleared up; or, at all events, what I am now going to say must entirely put an end to it. You may rest quite assured that the subject we both have in view was never for an instant alluded to, even in the very indirectest manner, between your mother and me. I do not think that such a notion can for a moment have ever crossed her mind; and I can honestly affirm that, until this day, it never once entered mine. You must, therefore, acquit me now and for ever of any such unpardonable presumption."

I could not here again but observe and answer the glance which sought and encountered mine.

"Vinny, I use the words 'unpardonable presumption' advisedly. They alone can express, if not the feelings of others, at least my own

in the matter. Regretting, as I still do regret, the views which you and others take regarding your future prospects, I feel conscious that my opinions are perfectly impartial and thoroughly unconnected with any other object than that of your own happiness. Even were your affections not engaged—”

What more I might have said, what more she might have replied, I will not attempt to imagine. Suffice it to add that a suppressed titter, at the billiard-room door, warned me here that we were no longer unobserved.

“It seems to be pwogwessing favouwably, Cammy,” observed Lord Walter.

“To a degree,” was the reply.

“It’s all sewene again,” continued his lordship. “I suppose that we may dwaw near?”

“Well, Vinny, I hope that you have saddled it all upon that odious, meddling, chatterbox, Cammy,” said the thus self-described personage, enclosing in her hands the slender waist of her associate.

“We have done her ample justice, haven’t we, Sir Charles?” was Vinny’s reply.

"That's all right and tight," proceeded Lady Camilla. "I deserve to be—never mind what—for my share in the business; but it is too late now, and there is no use pining. Am I too forgiven, Mr. Calcraft?"

"Certainly you would be, were there anything whatever to forgive."

"Then," concluded Lord Walter, "I propose shaking hands frantically all round, and refreshing ourselves with a cup of tea."

The suggestion was cordially carried out, and the unpleasant little incident thus brought to a judicious and final issue. But if its result, when I dwelt upon it, was to exalt the fair Lavinia to a still remoter and more inaccessible sphere from this mortal earth, I wish I could add that it tended also to remove her, in an equal degree, from my most secret thoughts.

## CHAPTER XI.

WITHIN a week or ten days from the passages just recorded, as I was sitting in my study, congenially employed, I was suddenly interrupted by the simultaneous entrance of my three youthful guests. As usual, Lady Camilla was the spokesman, or spokeswoman, though, perhaps, the former designation would be the most in accordance with her prefatory expressions. These were simply—

“Halloa, there, I say!—halloa! don’t you call this a lovely morning?”

“I do, indeed, Lady Camilla. As I sit here, by the open window, I should almost

think that this gentle breeze was wafted in direct from a tropical sun-rise."

"Very good. And what did you promise to do on the first fine day?"

"I quite forget."

"We don't—do we, Vinny? You said that you would take us all three to see your lion, Randolph ruins."

"Oh, I remember now; and should be most happy to do so, were it not Saturday."

"And what odds does that make, its being Saturday?"

"Simply, that it is an invariable practice with me to devote my Saturday mornings to my affairs—household and others; and that, within half an hour, I am expecting my steward and a man of business, by appointment."

"That won't do at all, will it, Walter?"

"It is an outrage upon pwopwietty to pwoffer such paltwy wubbish by way of an excuse."

"So it is," resumed Lady Cammy. "Heaven

knows when we may have so fine a day again, and go we must."

"Certainly; by all means," replied I. "Shall I order the carriage for you?"

"We don't want your twap, my good man, we have got our dwag; but we want you, don't we, Cammy?"

"We do, and we mean to have him, too. Come, will you go with us to Randolph ruins?"

"Will you go to Wandolf wuins?"

"Will you go to Randolph ruins?"

My chair was now closely besieged, and, what was more to the purpose, invested by the combined invaders, each articulating the summons in an appropriate tone; but I still held out.

"Really, I could not go to-day, until too late an hour to start."

"We'll soon see that," said Lady Cammy. "Business is at an end for you this morning, any how; so you had better at once make up your mind to go with us. Will you come?"

"No, really and truly, I cannot to-day."

"Then, we will give your papers such a rummaging as they won't recover for a month. Here, Walter, lay hold of these and see what they are."

"Weceipts."

"It's a pity there is no fire, or we would burn them. And you, Miss Dieaway, do you stir yourself, and see what these are."

"Weekly bills."

"Then, hand them over to Walter, who will give them a little gentle sorting. Now, Mr. Calcraft, will you go with us or not?"

"Certainly not. I never yield to compulsion what I have refused to entreaty."

"Very good; we'll soon see about that," cried Lady Camilla. "Wait till I give the drawers of this old table a little hand. What is this here?—household accounts. And this?—old letters. I have a great good mind to read them all out aloud. And this?—We have him at last—hurrah! hurrah!"

So joyous and cordial was the cheer, that it was re-echoed by the still unconscious allies.



"No, no, Lady Camilla," exclaimed I, in unfeigned apprehension.

"Oh, no! not at all;" was the exulting reply. "Hold him tight, both of you, while I carry my prize out of range."

The struggle which ensued with the two confederates, or at least with one of them, was not without its charms; but I was too well-bred to put forth much strength against Miss Dieaway's slender wrists, and her turbulent associate effected a successful retreat.

"Do you know what I have here, Vinny? This is a treasure!"

"What is it, Cammy?"

"Verses, real live verses! Lovely, enchanting, celestial poetry, the effusions of Calcraft's soul of souls! Who would have thought that he was a poet, an unappreciated Petrarch? Now, sir, which would you rather—go with us to Randolph ruins to-day, or have these read out aloud?"

"Why should I mind their being read out aloud?" replied I, anxious now to retrieve the

involuntary confession which certainly had appeared involved in the anxiety that I had for a moment betrayed. "How can you tell that they are mine, and not copied out, or written by a friend."

"He is not the worst friend you have in the world, the man who wrote these," responded Lady Cammy; "nor the one in whom you take the least interest. The corrections tell a little tale of their own; but we do not require any admission, so sure are we that the effusions, like good wine, will require no bush. Now for it; hold him tight, you fellows, and mind he doesn't come near me. What shall we have first—something not too long nor too short neither?"

Lady Camilla examined very cursorily, in some such strain, the long-immured captives, doubtful which she would first drag from its secure recess into the dreaded daylight, and read out as follows:—

TO THE FAIR AUTHORESS OF A RELIGIOUS BOOK.

Who would not weep o'er thy inspired page,  
Lovely Cassandra of this impious age ?

Yet still the warning voice is raised in vain !  
How could we fix our thoughts on God alone,  
When angels, such as thou, forsake his throne  
To make this earth a paradise again ?

"Upon my word—upon my word," resumed Lady Camilla, when she had concluded, "they are not quite so very bad, after all. What do you think of them, Vinny ?"

"I think them lovely, dear. Pray read them again, there's a darling."

When Lady Camilla had complied with this request, in a somewhat less jocular tone than before, Miss Dieaway again expressed her approbation in very flattering terms, and Lord Walter himself vouchsafed to pronounce the performance to be 'vewy cweditable.'

"So far, so good, now what shall we have next. Ahem ! ahem ! what's this ?"

UNDER THE THIRD PORTRAIT OF A VERY HANDSOME GIRL.

Each pencil fails thy Beauty to retrace :  
He who made all alone could sketch thy face.

"Pretty fair, pretty fair—we'll stick that under our pictures, Vinny, if we don't think ourselves beautiful enough, won't we?"

"I pwopound that they must have been witten for Vinny herself," observed his lordship. "I should like to see the artist who would wewesent her beauty cownectly. What's the name of that Fwench fellow—the gwreat painter of all?"

"Poussin, do you mean?" said Lady Camilla.

"No, not Poussin; it begins with an R."

"Rubens?"

"No, not Wubens. Wa—wa—Waphael, I mean."

"He wasn't a Frenchman, stupid; he was an Italian."

"It's all one. Waphael himself would have made a mess of her—that's all I pwesume to say."

"Then I wish you would say nothing at all, Walter, rather than talk such nonsense," urged Miss Vinny, languidly; "I really do."

“Come, don’t quarrel, you two, and we’ll see what we are to have next. Hallo ! this is tolerably warmish. We must allow, I suppose, for the influence of the torrid zone.

AN EASTERN SERENADE.

The sun would be like thee, were his disc without stain ;  
The moon as fair as thou, were she never to wane ;  
Did such dull clouds ne’er flit across the star-clad skies,  
Their brightest orb, perchance, might rival thy dark eyes,  
Amina, my adored.

The choicest summer flower, thou braidest in thy hair,  
Shows but as the dim shade to all the splendour there ;  
The richest of the gems that rest upon thy brow,  
Is not so passing pure, so passing bright as thou,  
Amina, my adored.

What mortal man could live, and on such beauty gaze ?  
Too deadly is its spell, too scorching are its rays ;  
Then why dost thou uplift thy kinder veil so high ?  
Is this, in truth, the death thou wishest me to die !  
Amina, my adored ?

“I say, Calcraft,” inquired Lady Camilla, when she had finished, “this isn’t borrowed from the ‘Arabian Nights’ at all, is it ?”

"You can best tell, Lady Camilla. I know nothing about it."

"Ah, well!" resumed she, sapiently, "it doesn't much matter, after all. Who inquires about the inspiration, if the execution is tolerably fresh and good? Romeo and Juliet, they say, was hawked about every barn in Italy, long before Shakspeare appropriated it to himself for ever. I think these rather insinuating, I own, and shouldn't mind being addressed in this sort of a way, some night, by a Persian prince in disguise, would you, Vinny?"

"Oh! as for me," answered Miss Dieaway. "I cannot say how pretty I think them; but I do wonder if they are really his."

"His? to be sure they are. Just watch his eye while I am reading them, that's all; though he tries to look so immensely unconcerned all the time, sorting his bills! Ah! would you? Lay hold of them, Walter, lay hold of them smartly. Hurrah! hurrah!"

These exclamations were produced by a sud-

den rush which I had made at my unfortunate papers ; but, though I succeeded in eluding the vigilance of both my detainers, Lady Camilla was too quick for me.

“That’s all right,” proceeded she, triumphantly. “Now you have got them, Walter, keep good hold of them. And, as to you, Vinny, you goose, don’t let him slip through again.”

“How could I help it,” rejoined her friend ; “he is ten times stronger than I am.”

“Of course he is ; but what does that matter. Just let me mount guard upon him with Walter, while you read out the poetry, and you’ll see if he will break away again. That will do ; and now, Mr. Calcraft, I am ready for you.”

“Well, but Lady Camilla,” here observed I, “let us rather see if we could not hit upon some terms of compromise. Will you let me have those unfortunate papers back, if I put off my business to day, and go with you to Randolph ruins ? ”

"No ; certainly not."

"Surely that is what we were contending for.

"Perhaps it was at first, but it is quite another matter now. You chose to be obstinate and disagreeable, and you must put up with the consequences. Besides, what does it signify to you, if the verses are not your own."

"They were never destined to meet any eye but the author's."

"And whose fault is it, pray, if they have ? Now, Vinny, read us out something pretty : we are all expectation."

This was a critical and anxious moment, indeed, for some one present, when Miss Die-away's soft eyes were seen wandering over the loose papers in search of the proximate victim. Could it be that her earnest commendation of its forerunners were sincere, and that she would remain equally indulgent now ?

"Dear me !" said she, musingly, "there are some in French, some in Italian, some in —— in something else—in Latin, I suppose. Are



"Yes—something owiental, if we can. I like the owiental style, about the sun and the moon and the Awabs and their pwoverbs."

"And so do I," cried Lavinia, fervently: "it reminds me of the Arabian Nights and all the splendid scenery and visions connected with them. Dear me! here is just about the sort of thing, I should think!"—

The blind man treads where the clear-sighted falls—  
Fraud and oppression haunt the noblest halls—  
High sits the child of Folly and of Lust;  
The spotless sage is prostrate in the dust—  
The wanton revels in her shameful spoil;  
The modest maiden eats the bread of toil—  
The Seraskier is struck down by a slave;  
The turban'd coward leads the conqu'ring brave—  
Th' accursed Giaour trades in Regal loans;  
In poverty the faithful Moslem groans—  
Repine not—'Tis the All Powerful's decree,  
And He'll not change it, mortal man, for thee.

"Well, now I like that," cried Lady Camilla, when her friend had concluded. "That sort of sententious wisdom just suits my indisposition."

"And mine too," added his lordship. "It makes one wreflect, and I like being made to wreflect. And yet I don't quite see the mowal."

"Don't you, stupid?" interposed Lady Camilla. "It's clear enough."

"What is it, then?"

"That the events of this world are not, and never will be, regulated according to our comprehension."

"Yes; but what's the use of telling us that, after all, though the verses are vewy pwetty?"

"In the first place, it is the truth; and then, it prevents our being disappointed when we hear it thus told, instead of having to find it out by our own experience. It is a strange world this, Mr. Walter, and it is well that we should not become too much attached to it."

"Pewhaps so; but still it would be ungwateful, you know, Cammy, not to appweciate pwoperly all the pleasuwes and comforts of this life."

"We may appreciate them, of course, Walter," observed Miss Vinny; "but we should remember that this is only a state of preparation for a better world."

"In the meantime, I don't think this a vewy bad one; what say you, Cammy?"

"Well, I agree pretty well with you, so far, Walter."

"I should think you did, as yet, Lady Camilla," here remarked I.

"And I trust that I always shall," continued the high-spirited maiden. "I don't mean to mope, I can tell you, so long as I am within reach of Vinny, Walter, and Dauntless."

"Yes, Lady Camilla; but if Lavinia, and Lord Walter, and Lord Dauntless were no more?"

Lady Camilla looked very grave. It seemed as if no such contingency as this had ever crossed her mind before.

"Such things might happen, to be sure," said she, at length; "but as they have not

occurred yet, we need not distress ourselves beforehand. So, Vinny, read us out something more cheerful."

"Something more cheerful, let me see;— what do you think of an epitaph?"

"An epitaph! ah! ah! ah! vewy good, indeed. Let us have the epitaph, by all means, to bwighten us up."

FOR A CONQUEROR'S TOMB.

Here slumbers one who ne'er did rest before;  
Pass gently by, lest he should wake once more.

"Bwavo! bwavo!" exclaimed his lordship;  
"I call that wather impwessive— don't you, Cammy?"

"Yes; I am decidedly satisfied. Go on, Vinny."

"Will you have another epigram?"

"By all means, my tweasure; it will we-fresh us to hear another epigwam, if it is a wespectable one."

"Well, what say you to this?"—

"How difficult," quoth Jack, "what Fanny plays."

"I wish it were impossible," Tom says.

"Vewy good, vewy good, indeed," vouchsafed his lordship, and no dissentient voice was raised.

"Ah, but here is something much prettier," said Miss Lavinia.

"Pwodge it, Vinny, pwodge it at once."

AN ORIENTAL PARTING.

"Ali, when I am gone, how wilt thou live?"

"Say this, my soul, to him who could survive."

"A very pretty reply, indeed, and very prettily expressed," cried Lady Cammy. "It would almost be a pleasure to be parted with in this way. Hurrah! for Calcraft, although he looks so innocent all the while."

"Huwwah! huwwah!" re-echoed his lordship. "But I say, Vinny, couldn't you introduce us to something wather longer, wather more developed. All these last are dweadfully short."

"Something longer, Walter? What have I got here?"

"Time was my days were all serenely bright,  
And sleep would lull me through each live-long night;  
Where hast thou borne my peace and rest away,  
Thou on whom beauty sheds her purest ray  
From the soft parting of thy braided hair  
Unto thy jewelled anklets. Yet beware!  
The Cadi's justice is both swift and sure:  
No robbery nor theft doth he endure.  
Should Allah will that he should learn thro' whom  
Such loss I suffer, sharp would be thy doom.  
If not for me, for thine own safety's sake,  
Restore my rest, and nothing further take."

"I fear not the Cadi. Were he to appear,  
I should raise up my veil to no further than here:  
Like thee, at my feet, he would fall down and rave,  
And swear that dread justice herself was my slave."

"Capital!" exclaimed Lady Camilla. "I like that girl's spirit and good opinion of herself. I hope there is some more of it, Vinny?"

"That there is; but we have a word coming which I don't understand. 'Ca—Cawas.'"

"Ask Mr. Calcraft; he will explain it to you. He is so very obliging."

"Indeed, Lady Camilla, I am no orientalist."

"Come, come," said her cousin, beseech-

ingly. "You know what that word means, at all events; and you won't spoil all our pleasure by keeping us in the dark, will you now?"

There was no withstanding the look which accompanied this appeal, so I replied :

"The officers of justice are called 'Cawases,' in some parts of the Levant, I believe."

"That's all wight. And now we know all about it, Vinny—pway pwoceed."

"Be not too rash. As I went past just now  
The Syrian gate, a man with livid brow,  
And trembling steps, and panic-stricken eye,  
By armed Cawases was hurried by.

I asked what was his crime, and what his fate.

'Immediate death, young man, doth here await,'

Replied a stranger; 'such as this vile wretch,  
Who could the hand of friendship first outstretch,  
And then with dagger rend his heedless foe?'

If any such, Enchantress, thou dost know,

Who pierces hearts with smiles so seeming fair,

As thou dost love her, bid her yet beware."

"Full well do I know her, but naught need she dread.

Were Cawas' in hundreds to seek for her head,

When they saw her, by thee, at her feet they would kneel;

And her glance, I am told, would slay them like steel."

"Excellent. I am sorry that we cannot meet that young lady in London; I should cotton to her amazingly, there is no doubt of that," observed Lady Cammy. "But, Vinny, dear, see if you couldn't make out for us some more of that Oriental wisdom, which sounds so imposing."

"Pwecisely," assented her cousin; "Cal-cwaft's poetwy is gwowing wather too fwivolous. We wequire something more sewious—something gwaver."

"Something more serious, something graver? Perhaps this may suit your views," replied the fair reader. "It seems sententious and Oriental to a degree."

"Travel, my son. Forsake thy childhood's home,  
Knowledge will follow thee where'er thou'lt roam.  
Thou'lt meet a friend for each that stays behind,  
And wearier limbs the softer slumbers find.  
Observe how dull the stagnant water grows,  
While bright and gladsome is the stream that flows—  
No fame awaits thee in thy native place :  
The travell'd stranger claims the warm embrace.



Journey, my son. Forget thy childhood's home,  
Increasing state attends on those that roam,  
Unless the arrow from the bowstring flies,  
It ne'er will bring its mark down from the skies ;  
Unless the horse forsakes his native plain,  
He ne'er will grace the Sultan's glittering train ;  
Unless the lions from their forest stray,  
They ne'er will meet their unsuspecting prey.

Travel, my son. Forsake thy native home,  
Welcome will greet thy steps where'er they roam.  
The gold-dust shone unheeded in the sand,  
Till traders brought it to a distant strand ;  
In Ocean's depths the pearl unvalued lay,  
Till daring divers bore the prize away ;  
The aloe-tree into the fire was cast,  
Till bart'ring merchants claim'd it as they past.  
Journey, my son. Forsake thy native place :  
The travell'd stranger claims the warm embrace."

"I must read this again," observed Vinny, thoughtfully : "it is not easy at first sight to enter into the spirit of each detail."

A second reading was generally agreed to.

"I am perfectly gwatified, and I think that we are all thowoughly gwatified," then exclaimed Lord Walter ; "but still, love

is the soul of poetwy, and, now that we have wevelled in the gwave and sewious, we should wejoice again in something tender. I am sighing for some poetwy which would descwibe the adowation that swells within my bweast at the sight of my own tweasure."

"Now, no nonsense, Walter, if you please."

"There is some truth in what he says, Vinny, dear, irrespective of his rather emphatic compliments. Give us something of a love-song."

"Something of a love song, Cammy? Well. I think that I can just suit you."

AN ORIENTAL COURTSHIP.

"I met thee, I saw thee, thy veil was apart,  
And the blaze of thy beauty fell full on my heart;  
'Twas but for one fast-fleeting moment it shone,  
But my rest, and my peace, and my freedom were gone.  
Thou slender-shap'd houri, oh! where can we meet,  
That thy servant may worship the dust at thy feet?"

"Who art thou, base stranger, that darrest address  
Such insolent vows to a Persian Princess?  
If the King, my dread father, were ever to hear  
Of thy rashness and folly, thy doom would be clear:  
Full soon would he cause thee to rest with the dead,  
And fix on our gateway thy traitorous head."

"It is not thy father I value or fear,  
And what recks my heart of the sword or the spear!  
The arrow that pierc'd it is from thy dark eye,  
Thy slave, O Enchantress, must hope or must die."

"Pretender to feelings thou never hast known,  
Go pour forth thy vows to the star and the moon—  
For the Persian Princess is above thee as far,  
As the Queen of the Night or the furthestmost star."

"I have pour'd forth my suit to the Queen of the Night,  
And wooed the bright star for one beam of his light—  
They came to my casement—I open'd it wide,  
And their rays streamed in to repose by my side.  
They rested so softly, so lovingly there—  
Why art thou more cruel that art not less fair?"

"The moon may be fickle, the star may be frail,  
But with me thy mad love-suit will never avail.  
I charge thee, by Allah, to vex me no more,  
Or the rash slave that ventures again to my door  
With a message, or letter, or token from thee,  
The heavenly day-break will never more see."

"Harm not my poor slave who this answer will bear,  
But bid thy fierce eunuchs their weapons prepare,  
For, myself, I will go to thy garden to night,  
That the death which I long for be dar'd in thy sight."

"By Heaven! I'll prove thee—This night at my gate,  
Ten well-armed eunuchs thy steps shall await—  
If thou comest, to thee shall be done as I've said,  
And the doom thou hast courted must rest on thy head."

"Did ever you hear of such a Tartar?" cried the indignant Lady Camilla. "I hope he will go, though."

"Oh! don't interrupt, dearest Cammy. It will all come right in the end, I am sure."

"Don't intewwupt, don't intewwupt, Cammy," re-echoed his lordship. "It is not fair by Calcwaft. Go on, my tweasure."

Thereupon Miss Vinny proceeded.

"I came as I told thee—The Moon was so bright  
That it flooded thy garden with silvery light—  
But its lustre, so purely, so radiantly clear  
Sank into dim shadow when thou didst appear.  
Oh! where were thy guards with their dagger and lance,  
Less deadly, by far, than thy pitying glance?"

"Who art thou whose gaze is more burning than fire?  
What land is thy realm, and what King is thy sire?  
Who clothed thy features in beauty so rare?  
Whom wilt thou not conquer? What wilt thou not dare?  
As I faint at thy view I would kneel to thy word,  
My master, my sultan, my vanquishing lord."

"Hurrah! hurrah!" cried Lady Cammy;  
"she will pay for it after all, I fervently trust."

But perhaps she only meant from the first to put his courage to the test."

"So I suspect dear; but don't interrupt."

"Don't intewwupt, old fellow, don't intewwupt,—we have told you so before."

"My birth and my state are no less than thine own,  
My cradle, O haughty Princess, was a throne—  
But say, thou whose glance is more piercing than steel,  
Dost thou but inflict, or canst thou also feel?"

"If e'er I inflicted the torments I feel  
May Allah forgive me and teach me to heal!—  
But, in pity, thy name and thy lineage tell  
To the heart-stricken maiden who loves thee so well."

"I will not my name and my station unfold  
To one who is fickle, and changeful, and cold.  
I knew not thy rank when my soul flew to thee:  
Is it but my state that thou lovest, or me?  
Oh! tell me in truth what thy heart doth endure,  
And then we shall see whether I too can cure."

"Such transport is mine as the Arab slave knows,  
Who yearns for the Hedjaz, its laurel, its rose—  
Who marks the long caravan reaching our shore  
From the home of her childhood she'll see never more,—  
And whose ardour doth burn, and her tears flow as fast  
As the water and flame of their hasty repast."

But the pleasures of my auditory were here brought to a most untimely end. Observing

that the attention of the two fair cousins was fully absorbed by the verses, and that of Lord Walter in the contemplation of his varnished boots, I made so sudden a rush upon my papers that, in a second, they were transferred, first from Lavinia's gentle grasp to mine, and then to their appointed drawer. This was not locked, to be sure, without a very sharp struggle, in which Lady Camilla bore no mean part; but neither the shouts of the allies nor their more effectual endeavours were able to prevail, so unexpectedly had my rights of property been at length vindicated and secured.

through diffidence, through general infirmity of purpose, have never given it that degree of cultivation necessary for bringing it into real and active operation. Others may have been deterred, by early criticism or failure, from renewing efforts which would eventually have been successful. Others, again, have needed, less the aptitude itself, than the stimulus too often required to develop it."

"How strange!" repeated Lavinia, thoughtfully. "I had never fancied before that a man could be a poet, and not write verses, as it were, naturally, and without effort."

"Exactly. You imagined him to be ever an impulsive, inspired son of heaven, producing, on such a morning as this, or on such evenings as we may now expect, as many rhymes as he could retrace, with scarcely any other labour than that of putting them on record. How startled you would be if you were to behold the weary artizan of thought at his lonely vigil—the midnight lamp of Byron—the ten lines, triumphantly de-

clared by Goldsmith to be an excellent day's work."

"So this beautiful poetry which we read, and which flows so smoothly onwards is, after all, the result of much care, time, and labour?"

"Unquestionably ; and of more care, time, and labour than some, perhaps, who are born poets, would think worthily requited by the highest meeds of literary success."

"Well, I never imagined that before. And is this the case with all literary compositions?"

"Undoubtedly ; and with most of the arts and pursuits of mankind. If study, without natural aptitude, produces but poor results, the same aptitude, without a sufficient amount of application, must remain sterile and unprofitable."

"It is rather like the case of music with us," interposed Lady Camilla, who had been, as yet, a silent, but not an inattentive listener.



"You could not have stated a better instance," replied I. "You both well know what years of toil and instruction were expended by you, and upon you, before you had attained that laborious facility of execution which you both now possess. Society is full of those who, with an acquired power of performance as great as yours, still lack that natural taste and gift which enable them to make a satisfactory use of it. But how many more are there who, from want of practice and execution, will never be able to bring into play native talents for music of the highest order."

"Let me see, though," here observed Lady Camilla; "that applies to instrumental performance. For if a person had a strong natural turn for music, she might sing very prettily without the slightest instruction or practice."

"Yes, Lady Camilla, as a naturally gifted man might at times be impressive, and always most agreeable in conversation, and yet be

incapable of producing effect upon any description of assembly, simply from want of the required habit and study. You have been in the House of Lords, I suppose?"

"Yes; several times."

"Well, you have seen there men of the most determined energy of character, who have led regiments, or armies, or fleets into action without a passing thrill, and yet who cannot express their firmest opinion without every symptom of hesitation and anxiety. When their painful address is concluded, up springs the practised lawyer, or the accomplished orator. What vehemence in his manner!—what resolution in his tone!—what contagious fire of conviction bursts forth in every word that falls from him! You would deem him to be inspired by the deepest passions—nay, even by Heaven itself; yet what is the triumph he achieves, saving that which deservedly waits upon the exertions and the study of a life? And how many among his entranced listeners would have been his rivals,

had they applied themselves to the laborious science of elocution with a devotion equal to his own !”

“Very probably,” said Lady Camilla. “And yet I cannot but think that, where the native gift is very strong, it will not for ever be dormant.”

“I quite agree with you, and am convinced that, in some few and highly-favoured cases, the natural impulse will work itself into action, in defiance of every obstacle. But these are the exceptions, rather than the rule. A strong man, for instance, will yearn after exercise more than a weak one. But if, with some few, this desire for active exertion will grow into an unconquerable passion, with how many others will the latent vigour of the muscles be merely called forth under the pressure of some great interest, or some strong incentive?”

“Then, do you think,” resumed Lady Camilla, “that there are poets who would have produced much more or less than they

have done, had they been placed in different circumstances?"

"I do. It is quite a question with me whether Gray would not have written more had he been poor; and whether Goldsmith would have composed the 'Deserted Village' at all, had he been rich. Yet who could doubt the native aptitude of both? To a certain extent, I am convinced that such aptitude must bear its own stimulus with it; but perhaps not so irresistibly as many suppose."

"Then, to return to the original subject of our conversation, the——, who shall I say? the author, in short, of those lines is not a real poet, less by want of the faculty than from that of some internal energy, or external incentive to develop it?"

"That is your conclusion, my dear Lady Camilla, not mine. All I meant to imply was this—that a real poet, as you say, is the result of many component elements, and that the failure, or inadequate proportion of one or more of these may render the action of the others abortive."

This morn, thou wert the sweetest rose,  
That e'er was bath'd in early dew ;  
The wand'ring bee thy nectar chose,  
The Zephyrs kiss'd thee as they flew.

The nightingale's enchanting note,  
Thy slumbers lull'd at close of day ;  
While gently thro' the air did float  
The love-lorn dove's melodious lay.

Such was thy home, and such thy bower,  
Until a stern, relentless hand  
Pluck'd from the parent stem, the flower,  
And sent thee to a stranger land.

A stranger land ? Alas ! this town,  
With all its heartless gaiety,  
Its fickle smile, its causeless frown,  
Must be a stranger land to thee.

I'll place thee where my flowing vest  
Is clasp'd by many a sparkling stone ;  
Breathe not the secrets of the breast,  
That swells beneath th'embroider'd gown.

Oh ! tell not that the throbbing heart  
Beats wildly 'gainst the silken fold ;  
And speak not of the fev'rish start  
Although the brow be calm and cold.

Withered by sighs, thy leaves will fade  
And droop beneath the secret tear ;  
Be sigh, nor tear, by thee betrayed,  
For oh ! deceit is virtue here !"

"Well, they certainly are very pretty," said Lady Cammy, when her cousin had concluded, "and the author or the authoress would, perhaps, have become a real poet with a little application."

"And a little inclination, likewise, Lady Camilla."

"A little inclination?"

"Yes; a little inclination. For why should she apply herself to achieve excellence if she has no taste or wish for notoriety?"

"Well, I should think that any one who was able and certain to obtain success, would strive for it."

"A person might be able and yet not certain to obtain it; and, as I have already said, they might find some more congenial occupation for their time, than in seeking out what is, after all, but a vain and deceptive reward."

"So, when——who shall I say—the author, in short—wrote those lines which we were reading just now, he never intended to publish them?"

"Certainly not."

"Then, why was he at the trouble of composing them?"

"For the same reason, I suppose, that you were playing so charmingly on the piano, an hour ago—because he felt so moved."

"Perhaps," inquired Miss Dieaway, timidly, "they were written some time ago, when he was ——?"

"You were going to say when he was young."

"Not at all," replied she. "At most I could only have meant when he was younger."

"Never mind; though no doubt my wording is the more correct. Well, perhaps you will be surprised to hear that, though youth is the age of deep feeling and vivid impressions, it is usually in the colder and maturer years that these find their utterance."

"Are you quite sure of that?" said Lady Camilla.

"Quite so, in nine cases out of ten. And for this simple and almost necessary reason, that we feel instinctively, and without effort ;

while, to give a true and becoming expression to our feelings, is a matter of labour, of study, of experience,—a science, almost a trade.”

“Well, I cannot but still think that what is deeply felt must be readily expressed.”

“In conversation, perhaps, Lady Camilla, but hardly in writing. Of the thousands who feel deeply all around us, how few ever so much as reflect upon the means by which these impressions are recorded and imparted, or dream of mastering the mere rudiments of the art. We were referring just now to music as to a term of comparison. When Lavinia plays, in her happier mood, how great—how unsuspected perhaps—is the spell which she works! It is not we, the more accomplished listeners, if I may so speak, who alone are entranced; an unseen halo is cast over her whole sphere. The servants will pause from their neglected work to catch the magical sounds; the rude labourer without will start back as if, across the homely path of his everyday existence, the portals of heaven



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